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# REVOLUTIONARY NETWORKS

Women's Political and Social Activism  
in Cold War Italy and Yugoslavia (1945-1957)

## REVOLUTIONAIRE NETWERKEN

Politieke en Sociaal Activisme van Vrouwen  
in Italië en Joegoslavië tijdens de Koude Oorlog (1945-1957)

(met een samenvatting in het Nederlands)

### Proefschrift

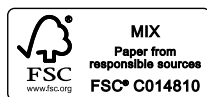
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door

**Chiara Bonfiglioli**

geboren op 24 januari 1983  
te Bologna, Italië

Promotor: Prof. dr. R. Braidotti



*A mia nonna Linda,  
Una ragazza degli anni Quaranta*

To my grandmother Linda,  
A girl of the 1940s

## Contents

<b>Acknowledgements</b> . . . . .	9
<b>Introduction</b> . . . . .	12
<b>Chapter 1</b>	
Theoretical and methodological framework of the research . . . . .	22
Introduction . . . . .	22
1 Women's history in Italy, Yugoslavia and the Italo-Yugoslav border area . . . . .	24
1.1 Temporalities: the antifascist foremothers and the feminist generation . . . . .	24
1.2 Women's political history across time and across national borders . . . . .	27
2 Women's history during the Cold War: uncovering agency . . . . .	30
3 Trans-European feminist genealogies: challenging the East-West divide . . . . .	33
4 Reading the cultural Cold War through a gender lens . . . . .	36
5 Cold War Orientalism and post-Cold War ethnography . . . . .	37
6 Research methodology . . . . .	40
6.1 Designing a research method . . . . .	41
6.2 Visits to archives in Italy and the former Yugoslavia . . . . .	43
6.3 Archival sources . . . . .	46
6.4 Autobiographies, biographies and oral history interviews . . . . .	49
6.5 Lost and found in translation: language and narrative . . . . .	52
6.6 Across Europe: traveling locations . . . . .	53
6.7 Across generations: subjectivity and agency . . . . .	55
<b>Chapter 2</b>	
Women's antifascist Resistance in Italy and Yugoslavia . . . . .	60
Introduction . . . . .	60
1 The Second World War in Italy and Yugoslavia . . . . .	62
1.1 The beginnings of the antifascist struggle . . . . .	62
1.2 Italian and Yugoslav women's encounters across borders during the war . . . . .	65

2	The foundation of the AFŽ and the UDI during the antifascist Resistance . . .	68
2.1	Women's resistance in Yugoslavia: the Antifascist Women's Front (AFŽ) . . .	69
2.2	Women's resistance in Italy: the Groups for the Defense of Women (GDD) and the Union of Italian Women (UDI) . . . . .	72
3	Assessing the impact of women's participation in the Resistance . . . . .	76
3.1	Images of female fighters in Yugoslavia and Italy . . . . .	77
3.2	Motherhood, "women" and femininity as consensual signifiers. . . . .	79
3.3	Beyond representation: women's agency in feminist historiography . . . . .	82
	Conclusion . . . . .	85

### Chapter 3

	The AFŽ, the UDI and the task of postwar reconstruction . . . . .	87
	Introduction . . . . .	87
1	Women's social work of national reconstruction . . . . .	89
1.1	The first postwar AFŽ congress (Belgrade, June 1945) . . . . .	91
1.2	The first postwar UDI Congress (Florence, October 1945). . . . .	93
1.3	UDI and AFŽ engagements in social work in the postwar years . . . . .	96
1.4	The paradigm of social motherhood after 1945 . . . . .	98
2	The 1946 Italian and Yugoslav Constitutions: formulating women's rights . . .	100
2.1	Overcoming women's inferiority as a legacy of previous regimes . . . . .	100
2.2	Women's equality as citizens and workers, women's difference as mothers . .	101
2.3	Women's equality as a "prize" or as a "natural outcome" of the Resistance . .	104
3	The pedagogic character of antifascist women's organizations . . . . .	106
3.1	The UDI and the AFŽ as avant-gardes: educating the feminine masses . . . . .	106
3.2	"Wearing trousers": UDI and AFŽ leaders rejecting "work among women" . .	109
	Conclusion . . . . .	111

### Chapter 4

	Women's internationalism after 1945 . . . . .	113
	Introduction. . . . .	113
1	The Women's International Democratic Federation (WIDF) . . . . .	117
1.1	The WIDF founding congress (November 1945, Paris) and the initial activities of the WIDF . . . . .	118

2	Transnational encounters in the postwar period: the Yugoslav example . . . . .	123
2.1	Yugoslav women's international recognition and the claim over Trieste . . . .	124
2.2	Italian women abroad: the uncoupling of Italian identity from Fascism . . .	128
2.3	The ambivalence of the Yugoslav model for Italian militants . . . . .	131
3	The Italo-Yugoslav border area as a microcosm of Cold War battles . . . . .	135
3.1	For a Yugoslav Trieste: the Union of Italo-Slovene Antifascist Women (UDAIS)	136
3.2	"Let's learn how to talk": women's class-based activism in a multi-ethnic city	142
	Conclusion . . . . .	147

## Chapter 5

	From comrades to traitors: the Cominform Resolution of 1948 . . . . .	149
	Introduction. . . . .	149
1	The Soviet-Yugoslav split and its consequences on women's internationalism . . .	151
1.1	The First and Second Cominform Resolutions (June 1948–November 1949) . .	151
1.2	The isolation of Yugoslav delegates at the Women's International Exhibition	155
1.3	"Sisterhood was no longer innocent": the second WIDF Congress in Budapest	159
1.4	The break of UDI-AFŽ relations and the exclusion of the AFŽ from the WIDF	163
2	Intra-communist wars in Yugoslavia, Italy and the Italo-Yugoslav border area	170
2.1	The making of Yugoslav "Cominformists" . . . . .	170
2.2	Enemy making: The AFŽ and the UDI amidst Cold War struggles . . . . .	174
2.3	The effects of the Cominform Resolution in the Italo-Yugoslav border area	179
	Conclusion . . . . .	183

## Chapter 6

	Into the field: the AFŽ, the UDI and the practice of emancipation . . . . .	186
	Introduction. . . . .	186
1	The AFŽ in the early Cold War era . . . . .	189
1.1	AFŽ campaigns in 1948–1953: women's equality as a modernization project . .	189
1.2	From darkness to enlightenment: the campaign against <i>feredže</i> . . . . .	192
1.3	Feminist historiography and the dissolution of the AFŽ in 1953. . . . .	196
1.4	The women's question as a social question: the IV and last AFŽ Congress. .	199
2	The UDI in the early Cold War era . . . . .	205
2.1	UDI campaigns in 1948–53: class conflicts and solidarity networks . . . . .	205
2.2	Peasant movements in Southern Italy: a "woman with no name" . . . . .	208

2.3 The UDI support of war rape victims in Cassino province . . . . .	211
2.4 Feminist historiography and the debate on the autonomy of the UDI . . . . .	214
Conclusion . . . . .	220

## Chapter 7

After 1956: national ways to women's emancipation . . . . .	224
1 The impact of 1956 on Italian and Yugoslav women's organizations . . . . .	228
1.1 A new climate within the UDI: redefining emancipation and autonomy . . . . .	228
1.2 Critical observers: Yugoslav SDŽ leaders and the WIDF . . . . .	232
2 Women's internationalism and its discontents . . . . .	235
2.1 The WIDF and the geopolitical crises of 1956 in Suez and Hungary . . . . .	235
2.2 Contesting Soviet hegemony: the WIDF Helsinki Plenum . . . . .	237
2.3 The 1957 Ljubljana meeting between Italian and Yugoslav leaders . . . . .	241
2.4 Women's questions: autonomy, contraception and abortion . . . . .	246
3 The difficult reconciliation in the Italo-Yugoslav border area . . . . .	249
Conclusion . . . . .	252

## Concluding remarks and suggestions for future research. . . . . 255

1 Women's transnational activism in Cold War Europe . . . . .	256
2 Gendering Cold War politics . . . . .	261
3 Post-Cold War feminist narratives . . . . .	263

## List of abbreviations . . . . . 267

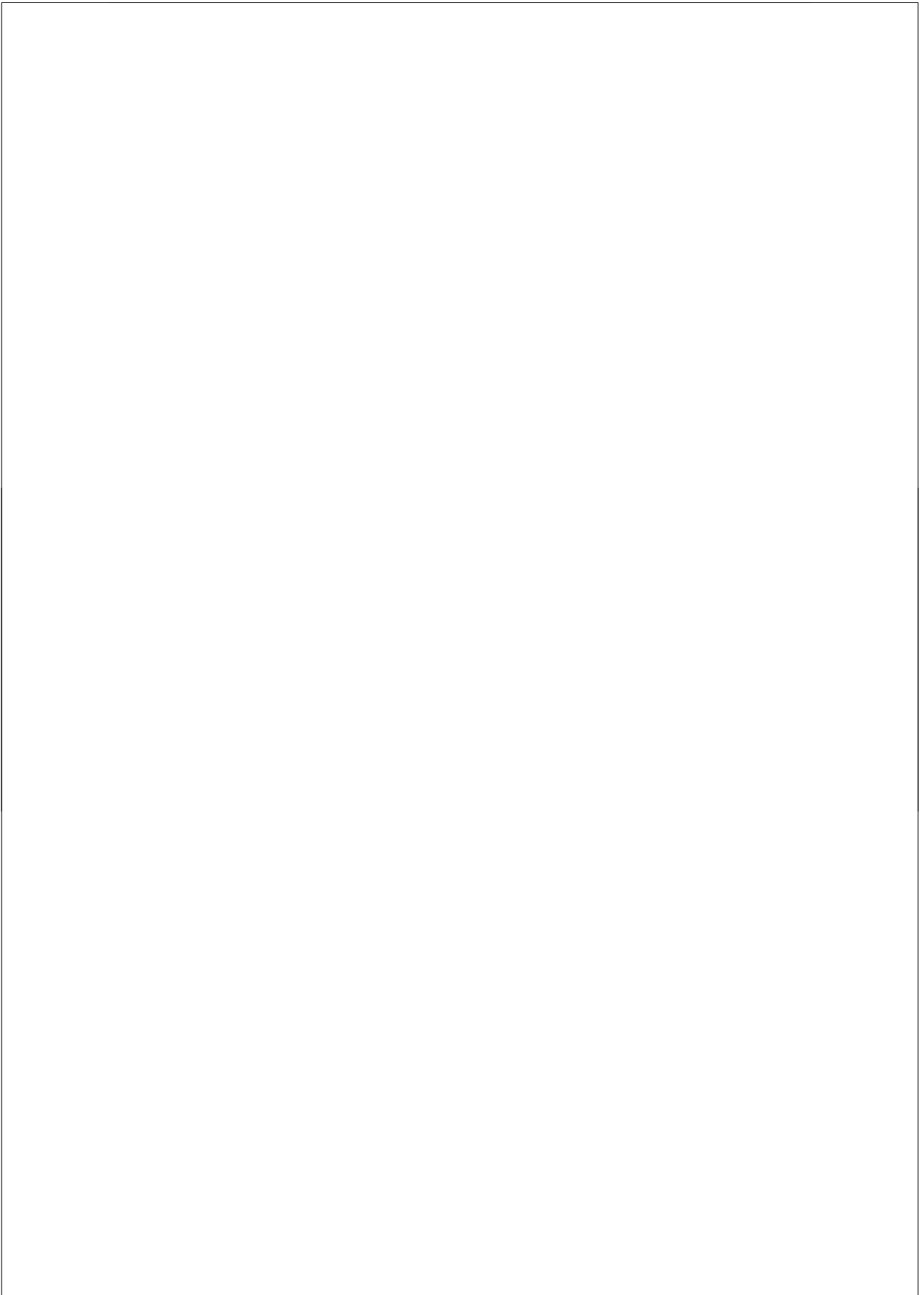
## Bibliography . . . . . 269

## Summary . . . . . 289

## Samenvatting . . . . . 292

## Biography . . . . . 296





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## Introduction

Sometime in the mid-1930s, in a village near the city of Modena, Italy, a girl of eight dared to ask a local Fascist chief: “Why you do not give my dad a job?” Her father, a member of the local communist party, could not get any manual work in the village, but had to support his wife and his five children by building streets in the Italian colony of Ethiopia. A picture of that worker – tanned by the long hours spent under the scorching sun, smiling among other street builders in post-1945 Italy – is one of the iconic pictures in my family. That girl who revolted against injustice at the age of eight is my maternal grandmother, the first antifascist woman I ever met, and the one I grew up with.

I was born in “red Bologna”, in what has been defined as “the region of Italy with the strongest left-wing traditions and the highest density of Communist Party membership in Western Europe” (Gundle 2000: 1). Crossed by the Gothic Line in the Second World War, it was also the Italian region with the strongest armed Resistance, and the theatre of particularly violent retaliations against civilians during the Nazi occupation of Northern Italy. The antifascist Resistance became the founding myth of Bologna’s postwar history and of its communist administration, lasting from 1945 until 1999.

In 1989, the year that marked the end of the socialist bloc in Eastern Europe and of communist parties in Western Europe, I was only six years old. But memories of the Partisan struggle were present in many families, and outlasted the so-called “end of history”. From my grandmother, I heard stories about my communist great-grandfather who “helped out the boys to get to the mountains” during World War Two, and about my grandmother being saved from a bad injury caused by bomb shrapnel, at the age of twelve, thanks to the penicillin provided by the Partisans. More family memories appeared since I have embarked on this research. The same communist great-grandfather allegedly kept a picture of Stalin at home, while a great-uncle, then sixteen years old, had escaped to Yugoslavia after the war to avoid being put on trial for his partisan activities.

“Fascism” and “antifascism” were still operative political categories when I became involved in politics in my high school years. I joined a group of students who called themselves “born from the Resistance”, a form of protest against the first right-wing city council’s proposal to modify the city’s statute and to eliminate the phrase “Bologna is a city born from the Resistance”. The myth of the antifascist Resistance outlasted the Cold War, and was reappropriated by contemporary movements for global justice, in the midst of neo-liberal discourse and wars on terror.

More than in any other place in Europe, when visiting my friends living in the former Yugoslavia, I encountered a similar nostalgic trace of the Resistance myths, and family memories of the antifascist struggle. But while our memories of war were distant echoes of stories told by our grandparents, across the Adriatic the Yugoslav wars (1991-1995) had just taken place. These “last wars”<sup>1</sup> had destroyed the multicultural Yugoslav Federation born from the antifascist Resistance, through violence and through forgetting. The massacre of Srebrenica (July 1995) was the largest one in Europe since World War Two.

Despite its closeness to Italy, the former Yugoslavia, starting from its very name, was placed in an historical time that “we Europeans” had supposedly overcome. Both the common past and the common present tended to be ignored in mainstream discourse, from the Fascist invasion of Yugoslavia during World War II to the responsibilities of the international community during the “last wars”. In post-Cold War historical revisionism in Italy, moreover, the antifascist Resistance and the idea of communism had been increasingly equated with the Balkans, placed in a dangerous zone at Italy’s Oriental border. The right-wing label of “Slavo-communist” epitomizes how antifascism was equated with violence, and associated with the Balkan Other, as if antifascist Resistance and communist ideas had never existed in Italy, or in Western Europe.

It was a winding path that led me to formulate the research questions for this dissertation. I started out studying the feminist movements of 1970s Italy and Yugoslavia, and I noticed some interesting parallels. In both countries, second wave feminists contested the Marxist doctrine of their respective communist parties, according to which women’s emancipation was subordinate to class struggle. In both countries, feminist activists had to confront their foremothers, the partisan women who had fought in the antifascist Resistance and who had engaged in women’s mass organizations such as the Italian Women’s Union and the Antifascist Women’s Front.

Moreover, while researching transnational connections between feminist women in Italy and Yugoslavia in the 1970s, I found hints of earlier exchanges between antifascist women in Italy and Yugoslavia after World War Two. In the 1970s, Italian feminists felt that their Yugoslav sisters had a lot to learn from them. Yugoslav feminists were invited to give up their illusions about socialist emancipation, and to engage in their autonomous struggle against patriarchy (Bonfiglioli 2011a). This is a far cry from the situation in 1946, when Italian antifascist women felt that they had a lot to learn from their neighboring Yugoslav comrades, since they had managed not only to liberate their country, but also to carry out a successful socialist revolution after the war, like in the Soviet Union.

Between the Second World War and the second wave of feminism, however, lay the uncharted historical period of the Cold War. While many scholarly publications dealt with women in the Resistance, and with 1970s feminist movements, the con-

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1 The expression “last wars” in the post-Yugoslav successor states refers to the Yugoslav wars of the 1990s, to distinguish them from the previous war, that is Second World War.

nections between different generations<sup>2</sup> of antifascist and feminist activists were under-researched. Since after 1989 the communist and socialist legacy in both Western and Eastern Europe has been largely discredited, the experiences of women within communist parties and mass organizations (particularly in the early Cold War years) remain largely unexplored. In order to fill in these gaps, I worked with the following research questions: Which forms of women's activism existed in Italy and Yugoslavia in the Cold War period? How did Italian and Yugoslav antifascist women's organizations contribute to women's emancipation in their respective countries?

The transnational dimension of the "women's question"<sup>3</sup> in postwar and Cold War Europe is also largely overlooked. The research available tends to have a national focus, or to use a comparative focus that is still affected by a Cold War paradigm. Generally, Italy is compared to countries in Western Europe, and Yugoslavia with other countries from the former Eastern bloc. In post-Cold War Europe, the material and imaginary division between West and East still haunts women's and feminist history. This led to another set of research questions: which transnational connections were established between Italian and Yugoslav antifascist women's organizations in the Cold War period? Which discourses about women's emancipation circulated between East and West, across Italo-Yugoslav borders?

In this study I trace a transnational history of women's antifascism and internationalism in Italy and Yugoslavia during the Cold War, challenging the post-Cold War, Orientalist idea of the "Balkans" as existing in a time zone outside "Europe". In this, the study has been inspired by post-colonial and post-socialist scholars who have challenged the Western image of the Other as distant not only in space, but also in time. As anthropologist Johannes Fabian (1983: 92) argues, "somehow we must be able to share each other's past in order to be knowingly in each other's present".

The research stems from an autobiographical and scholarly interest in the way historical, geographical and political locations shape women's and feminist history, and the production of feminist knowledge. As Rosi Braidotti (2011a: 16) writes, a "location" is "not a self-appointed and self-designed subject position, but rather a collectively shared and constructed, jointly occupied spatiotemporal territory. A great deal

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2 I am using here the concept of *generation* not in the sense of a determined age group but in the sense of a political generation, namely a generation sharing a common significant political experience, as suggested by Luisa Passerini (2006: 15). Passerini explicitly mentions the generation of the antifascist Resistance and the 1968 generation as examples of this usage of the concept of generation in current historical studies. See also Passerini (1996).

3 The 'women's question' or the 'woman question' is a term that has been employed since the second half of the nineteenth century to designate a number of social problems related to women's role in the modern industrial society. In Marxist theory, this formulation was used to tie the resolution of women's oppression to the advent of a socialist society. State socialist regimes – including Yugoslavia – claimed to have solved the women's question in the Cold War era, through advanced legislation, equal access to education and labor, and the socialization of child care. This Marxist formulation was challenged by second wave feminist movements. Adrienne Rich (1986) for instance wrote: "We are not 'the woman question' asked by somebody else; We are the women who ask the questions."

of our location, in other words, escapes self-scrutiny in that it is so familiar, so close, that one does not even see it.” It is this “jointly occupied spatiotemporal territory” that I have tried to investigate here, by providing a transnational genealogy of antifascist women’s organizations in Italy, Yugoslavia, and in the Italo-Yugoslav border area between 1945 and 1957.

Exploring this location entailed a personal journey. I discovered sides of Italian history that were previously unknown to me. I was also plunged into learning the official language of the former Yugoslavia, often defined by post-Yugoslav citizens as “our language” (*naš jezik*), for lack of less problematic definitions. Before I embarked on months of archival research in Rome, Belgrade, Trieste, Ljubljana and Zagreb, I had no idea of the richness of the multi-lingual material that I would encounter. In order to do justice to this material I chose to limit my study to the years 1945-1957. Women’s organizations founded during the Resistance, such as the Union of Italian Women and the Antifascist Women’s Front of Yugoslavia, continued to function in the post-war and early Cold War period, with millions of affiliated members in their respective countries. For many women who had taken part in the Resistance, the postwar and early Cold War period was a moment of fervent activism at the regional, national and international level.

The historical traces of this intense period were scattered in a myriad of national and local archives, mostly consisting of minutes of meetings, reports, and correspondence from the 1940s and 1950s. The main sources for this dissertation are archival documents that I selected and translated from Italian, Serbo-Croatian, Slovenian and French. Although I conducted a number of oral history interviews, and I analyzed a wide array of autobiographies and memoirs written by key antifascist women from Italy and the former Yugoslavia, archival sources constitute the backbone of the dissertation. Oral history interviews and autobiographies represent a crucial complement to the archival research, guiding my interpretation of the archival documents.

The dissertation is based on three main theses. The first thesis is that *antifascist women’s organizations played an active role in everyday Cold War politics in Italy and Yugoslavia*. As a result of historical and epistemological erasures, the story of women’s political activism in the Cold War period is largely untold. Throughout the dissertation, therefore, I reconstruct the different forms of women’s activism and explore the complexities and limits of left-wing women’s political agency and subjectivity. I focus in particular on the female leaders of antifascist women’s organizations, and on their position towards the base of rank-and-file militants, and towards the “feminine masses” they strived to reach. I also investigate to what degree Italian and Yugoslav women’s organizations were autonomous from their respective communist parties.

My second thesis is that *Italian and Yugoslav antifascist women’s organizations were crucial in promoting women’s emancipation in the Cold War period*. Antifascist women’s organizations allowed a multitude of women to take part in politics for the first time, and promoted women’s literacy on a large scale, as well as access to work and political participation. On the basis of a Marxist faith in modernization and his-



torical progress, antifascist female leaders fought against women's juridical, economic and social inferiority, at the risk of being accused of "feminism" by their male comrades. Contrary to the common belief that women's organizations disregarded the private sphere, I shall demonstrate that women's oppression in the private sphere and male violence were actively challenged. Furthermore, traditional conceptions of family and motherhood were reformulated in a progressive sense.

Thirdly, I posit that *Italian and Yugoslav antifascist women's organizations provided women with imaginary and physical connections across national and Cold War borders*, not only between East and West but also between the West, the Second World and the Third World. These connections have largely been forgotten. As I shall demonstrate, however, women's antifascist internationalism allowed progressive ideas about women's emancipation to circulate across borders. I explore the bilateral and multilateral relations of the Union of Italian Women and the Antifascist Women's Front, and their shifting position within the Women's International Democratic Federation (WIDF).

This study focuses on women's activism during the Cold War, a theme that has been traditionally neglected in women's and feminist historiography. The Cold War era – itself situated "between the waves", that is, the first and the second waves of feminism (Carlier 2009) – has usually been represented as a period lacking in activism. I aim to challenge this view by exploring the national and international activities of two women's organizations founded during the antifascist Resistance in Italy and Yugoslavia, the Italian Women's Union (*Unione Donne Italiane* – UDI) and the Antifascist Women's Front of Yugoslavia (*Antifašistički Front Žena Jugoslavije* – AFŽ) between 1945 and 1957. In particular, I look at the connections between the leaders of these two organizations, and at their role in setting a national and international agenda for the "woman's question" during the Cold War and before the emergence of the second feminist wave.

I use the cases of Italy and Yugoslavia to explore what Svetlana Slapšak (2000a) describes as the "complicated, dynamic and rather disappointing love affair between women and left-wing movements" in the second half of the twentieth century. As Geoff Eley argues referring to Western Europe, "whatever the detailed complexities and contradictions in the relationship of women to socialism, it is a salient fact of twentieth-century political history that female enfranchisement followed the fortunes of the Left. When socialist projects captured the popular imagination (...) the space was also open for expanding women's participation" (Eley 1998: 519).

Particularly significant with respect to the complex relationship between the women's movement and the left, is the history of women's internationalist and antifascist organizations created during Second World War. While the UDI and AFŽ leaders were to a large extent communist party militants engaged in party politics, they also had the task to ameliorate women's everyday lives and to promote women's rights on a nation-wide scale. For this, they relied on the egalitarian discourses promoted by communist parties, nationally and internationally. The task of women's emancipation, however, created conflicting loyalties: at the national level male activists often resisted women's participation and encouraged a gendered division of political labor within

the party, while at the international level broader geopolitical issues such as peace and disarmament were given a primacy over women's emancipation.

In addition to their activities at the local level, women's organizations were also active producers of Cold War cultural discourses at an international level. They were producing what Buck-Morss (2000) calls "dreamworlds", or imaginary projections that stemmed from East-West connections. Through women's organizations affiliated to the Women's International Democratic Federation, progressive ideas circulated across Cold War borders, ideas about equal rights for women in the public sphere, but also ideas about women in the private sphere, particularly motherhood. Motherhood was conceived of as a social phenomenon that had to be taken care of by state institutions through welfare and health provisions. A telling example of transnational circulation of ideas on progressive conceptions of motherhood is the one of the Lamaze method of childbirth. French obstetrician Fernand Lamaze learnt the method of "painless childbirth" in the Soviet Union, and he experimented with it in the maternity ward at the Parisian Metallurgists' Polyclinic, known as *Les Bluets*, from 1951 onwards (Michaels 2011).

After 1989, traces of post-socialist nostalgia can be found not only in Eastern Europe and in the successor states of former Yugoslavia, but also in Italy and France, two Western European countries where communist parties played an important political and social role in the second half of the twentieth century. The utopian trace of socialism's unfulfilled promises – of women's emancipation and liberation, of social justice, of multi-national and multi-ethnic coexistence – can be found in the contemporary nostalgic accounts of former left-wing activists, both in Italy, a capitalist country that hosted the largest communist party in Western Europe, and in Yugoslavia, a socialist country that abandoned the Soviet bloc in 1948, and became geopolitically closer to the West and to the Third World in later years (Bonfiglioli 2011b; Castellina 2011; Foa, Mafai and Reichlin 2002; Luthar and Pušnik 2010).

By comparing Italy and Yugoslavia, I intend to challenge Cold War mental and scholarly mappings between the First, Second and Third World (Chary and Verdery 2009). The comparison between these two different geopolitical contexts arises not only from their geographical proximity, but also from a personal desire to highlight commonalities and processes of "transculturation" (Cerwonka 2008) and "translation" (Iveković 2010) beyond the usual epistemic "East-West" division of feminist ideas and women's activism across Europe. As a number of scholars have shown, Cold War mappings are still very much present in the assessment of women's organizations and feminist ideas in post-Cold War Europe. Gender scholars from Eastern and Central Europe have pointed to the hegemony of Western liberal feminist thought, as well as to the 'othering' of women living in post-socialist states, through the academic and scholarly confinement of Eastern European "difference" (Blagojević 2009; Cerwonka 2008; Ghodsee 2010; Regul-ska 1998). This process of "othering" and victimization is even stronger in the case of the Balkans since the break-up of the Yugoslav Federation in the 1990s (Bakić-Hayden 1995; Helms 2003; Todorova 1997). Mainstream Orientalist discourses construct the Balkans as different from Europe not only in space, but also in time.

Because of their connection to socialist regimes, women's state organizations in Eastern Europe have often been represented as "transmission belts" of state ideology. In feminist literature, these organizations have frequently been portrayed as detrimental to women's rights and interests, and their members have been described as manipulated and deprived of agency (Cirstocea 2011; Nowak 2009; Penn and Massino 2009). The same happened with communist women's organizations in the West, and with the Women's International Democratic Federation, which connected West, East and the global South (De Haan 2010a). I agree with Raluca Popa when she argues that "it is important to challenge this stigma and to recover and reassess the history of communist women's activism, not only for women's history but also for understanding political history; it offers crucial insights into the actual working of communist regimes at the interface between official discourses and party power, and the everyday lives of elite individuals" (Popa 2009: 74).

Even in Western Europe and in the United States, Cold War and post-Cold War anti-communism had the effect of obscuring the continuities between the radical women's movements and organizations of the 1940s and 1950s and the feminist second wave (MacLean 2002; Storrs 2003). Recent studies have explored the importance of women's left-wing, labor and antiracist activism in Cold War times, and the influence of Marxism and antifascism in the United States and Canada, also via the emigration of Jewish exiles from Europe (Cobble 2004; Horowitz 1998; Lerner 2002; Thorn 2010; Weigand 2001). Scholars are now debating the "theoretical and historical relationship between feminism, communism and (state) socialism" (De Haan 2007), as in the Forum hosted by the first number of the review *Aspasia* in 2007. New research also emphasises how different forms of women's international activism were shaped by Cold War struggles and national interests, notably in relation to UN conferences and assemblies on the status of women (Ghodsee 2010; Laville 2002; Popa 2009).

Cold War debates on women's emancipation were transnational, and emerged in connection to left wing, antifascist and antiracist movements. By proving this point, the study aims to provide a different narrative of European feminist genealogies (Griffin and Braidotti 2002), one that challenges the contemporary mainstream framing of "Western" feminist histories. As Hemmings has convincingly argued, contemporary discourses tend to frame gender equality as "Western, capitalist, and democratic, and the West, capitalism, and democracy themselves as sites that create the possibility of, and reproduce, rather than hinder, gender equality" (Hemmings 2011: 9). This framing of gender equality is based on a temporal fantasy of "a shared oppressive past, already moved beyond in the West, but culturally present for the South and the East" (2011: 149). In this way, gender equality is described as a Western trademark that can be exported globally, in the non-Western or post-socialist context.

By showing the "entangled history" (Werner and Zimmerman 2006; Carlier 2010) of women's antifascist organizations in Italy and Yugoslavia, I contest the Cold War historical fantasy of a "time lag" between Western and non-Western Europe, between Italy and former Yugoslavia, between capitalism and socialism. Large numbers of women living in Italy, Yugoslavia, and in other countries across Europe shared the experience of political repression, violence, injustice and threat of direct extermina-

tion under Nazi-Fascism. Many participated in the clandestine and dangerous work carried out during the antifascist Resistance and many shared the personal losses suffered during the war. In 1945, antifascist women in Italy and Yugoslavia engaged enthusiastically in the reconstruction effort. They placed their hopes in the new political systems that emerged after the war, and actively worked to bring an end to poverty and class oppression, as well as to promote women's rights and women's participation in the political realm.

Quintessentially interdisciplinary, this research is placed at the intersection between women's and feminist history, Cold War political history, post-socialist and post-colonial studies. I will now describe how these different disciplines are interwoven within each chapter. The first chapter of my dissertation contains the theoretical and methodological frameworks of the research. I discuss in some detail the different scholarly debates to which I wish to contribute, namely current debates about women's activism during the Cold War period, as well as debates on European feminist genealogies across East and West. I define the theoretical frameworks that allowed me to navigate across the empirical material I had selected, particularly the frameworks of the "cultural Cold War" and of "Cold War Orientalism", articulated from a gendered perspective. I provide an outline of contemporary scholarly debates about women's history in Italy and post-Yugoslav successor states, and discuss the possible reasons for which antifascist women's activism in Cold War Italy and Yugoslavia has been written out of history. In the final part of Chapter 1 I describe the research methodology; I cite the reasons for the choice of an historical narration, and I discuss the types of document analyzed throughout the dissertation, highlighting their potentials and their limitations. I end the chapter by reflecting on my own post-Cold War, feminist, transnational, multi-lingual location, discussing how it influenced my relation towards the Cold War era and towards the generation of antifascist women of Southern and South-Eastern Europe I choose to study.

In the remainder of the dissertation I organize the empirical material collected from archival research, oral history interviews and autobiographies in an historical narrative. The empirical part of the dissertation is divided into six chapters, conforming to both a chronological and thematic order. Each chapter in a different way argues the three main theses of the research: I demonstrate that Italian and Yugoslav antifascist women's organizations played an active role in everyday Cold War politics, that they were crucial in promoting women's equal rights in the Cold War period, and that they provided women with imaginary and physical connections across national and Cold War borders. Each chapter is introduced by an episode from a life story of an antifascist Italian or Yugoslav militant. This gives an immediate, tangible example of the complex political issues unraveled within each chapter, but also makes apparent how women's personal stories were entangled with broader geopolitical narratives.

Chapter 2, *Women's antifascist Resistance in Italy and Yugoslavia*, provides an introduction to the complex history of the antifascist Resistance across the Italo-Yugoslav border. The chapter describes how transnational encounters between antifascist

women had already started during World War Two, in Fascist jails or in concentration camps, such as the women's concentration camp of Ravensbruck. I compare the historiography about women's participation in the antifascist Resistance in Italy and Yugoslavia, relying on the secondary literature which describes the foundation of Italian and Yugoslav women's antifascist organizations, the Union of Italian Women (UDI) and the Antifascist Women's Front of Yugoslavia (AFŽ).

Chapter 3, *The aftermath of the war: the UDI, the AFŽ and the task of reconstruction*, examines the postwar activities of the UDI and AFŽ at the local level. Archival documents about the 1945 congresses of the two organizations are described, contextualized and compared, analyzing the definitions of women's emancipation adopted by antifascist female leaders in postwar Italy and Yugoslavia. The chapter shows how antifascist women's activism continued in the postwar period, notably in the field of reconstruction and social work, as well as in the drafting of women's political, economic and social rights in the new Yugoslav and Italian Constitutions of 1946. This chapter mainly contributes to the second thesis of this dissertation, demonstrating that Italian and Yugoslav antifascist women's organizations were crucial in promoting women's emancipation in the postwar and Cold War period.

In contrast to the preceding emphasis on UDI and AFŽ local activities in favor of women's emancipation, Chapter 4, *Women's internationalism after 1945*, focuses on the active role played by antifascist women's organizations in everyday Cold War politics in Italy and Yugoslavia, and on the connections established by UDI and AFŽ members across borders. Based on extensive archival research, the chapter recounts how Italian and Yugoslav women's organizations established bilateral and multilateral relations within the framework of the newly founded Women's International Democratic Federation (WIDF). The case of the antifascist women's organization of Trieste, the Union of Italo-Slovene Antifascist Women (*Unione Donne Antifasciste Italo-Slovene* – UDAIS), is also introduced in this chapter, illustrating how ideas about women's emancipation circulated at the international, national and local level.

Chapter 5, *From comrades to traitors: the Cominform Resolution of 1948*, provides an analysis of the Soviet-Yugoslav split of 1948-1949, focusing on its impact on Yugoslav, Italian and Italo-Slovene women's organizations in Trieste. In particular, I discuss the exclusion of the Antifascist Women's Front of Yugoslavia from the Women's International Democratic Federation in 1949. The chapter affirms the notion that women's organizations were active producers of Cold War narratives, and indicates how these narratives contributed to political repression and to the creation of internal and external enemies. The transnational perspective allows me to highlight the role of the WIDF, the AFŽ, the UDI and UDAIS in the production of Cold War narratives, and the part played by the leaders of these organizations in promoting the interests of their respective communist parties at the international level.

Chapter 6, *Into the field: the AFŽ, the UDI and the practice of emancipation*, covers a number of activist campaigns conducted by AFŽ and UDI in the less developed, rural areas of Italy and Yugoslavia between 1948 and 1953. The campaign against the full veil (*feredže*) in Yugoslavia and the campaign in favor of Italian women victims of rape by Allied soldiers in WWII are pertinent examples. While the previous chapter examined

how women's organizations aligned themselves with their respective communist parties in international politics, this chapter highlights the conflicts that arose between women's organizations and communist party cadres at the local level, on issues such as violence against women and the gendered division of labor within the party. Issues that have been widely debated by feminist historians, such as the degree of political autonomy of the UDI and the AFŽ in the early Cold War period, as well as the dissolution of the AFŽ in 1953, are discussed in detail.

In Chapter 7, *After 1956: national ways to women's emancipation*, I analyze the changes in the Cold War geopolitics of 1956, and its effects on women's organizations in Italy, Yugoslavia and Trieste. In this chapter I discuss the new "autonomous" political line chosen by the UDI in these years as well as Italian and Yugoslav female leaders' critique of Soviet hegemony. I examine how antifascist leaders worked to transform the methods and goals of the Women's International Democratic Federation by strengthening the focus on women's rights. I look, moreover, at Yugoslav female leaders' engagement in the politics of Non-Alignment, in connection with Third World women's organizations and decolonization movements. The main three theses of the dissertation are reestablished in this chapter: Italian and Yugoslav antifascist women's organizations played an active role in everyday Cold War politics, favoring the circulation of progressive ideas about the "women's question" across Cold War borders, including the Italo-Yugoslav border.

## Chapter 1

### Theoretical and methodological framework of the research

#### Introduction

Listening today to the voices of women from the past,  
one sees not only the mistaken choices which should not to be repeated,  
but also the unspent reserves of utopian energy.

*For it is an irretrievable picture of the past, which threatens to disappear  
with every present, which does not recognize itself as meant in it.*

(Lydia Sklevicky, quoting Walter Benjamin's Fifth thesis on the concept of history)<sup>4</sup>

In the late 1970s and early 1980s, Zagreb feminist historian Lydia Sklevicky (1952-1990) started to investigate women's postwar history in the Yugoslav context from a gender studies perspective, conducting some pioneering research on the Antifascist Women's Front of Yugoslavia during Second World War and in the postwar period. While researching women's history before and after the socialist revolution, the feminist historian was confronted with the 'invention of tradition'<sup>5</sup> promoted by the socialist authorities, according to which "women have always been ideally integrated into the revolutionary (socialist, communist) tradition" (1989a: 70). According to this 'invented tradition', women's emancipation was an inevitable consequence of the socialist revolution, and not a result of longstanding women's struggles. Despite the fact that women's emancipation was presented as a consequence of socialism, however, predominant historical narratives followed a typical patriarchal pattern. Yugoslav history schoolbooks, in fact, figured "more horses than women" beside the usual male heroes (Sklevicky 1989a). Lydia Sklevicky confronted the official version of women's history promoted by socialist authorities, which, she argued, had erased women's agency throughout history. She challenged the patriarchal character of dominant socialist

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4 Sklevicky's original passage (1996: 69) goes as follows: "Osluškivanje glasova žena iz prošlosti danas može ukazati podjednako na pogrešne izbore koje ne bi trebalo ponavljati, kao i na neistrošene rezerve utopijske energije. Jer sa svakom sadašnjosti može u nepovrat iščeznuti slika prošlosti, u kojoj ona nije znala prepoznati sebe (Walter Benjamin)."

5 Sklevicky borrows this formula from Hobsbawm and Ranger (1983). As defined by Hobsbawm, the term encompasses "a set of practices, normally governed by overtly or tacitly accepted rules and of a ritual or symbolic nature, which seek to inculcate certain values and norms of behaviour by repetition, which automatically implies continuity with the past" (1983: 1).

histories of her time, which excluded women as historical subjects. After a meeting with the surviving editor of the 1939-1941 women's journal *Ženski Svijet*, Sklevicky wondered: "How was it possible that a tradition of struggle, of commitment with the highest personal costs, and which would have energized generations of women, had been simply wiped out of my generation's historical consciousness?" (1989a: 68).

The dominant historiography of the Second World War, in which women were excluded as autonomous historical subjects, was unchallenged in Yugoslavia and Italy until the 1970s. Only with the emergence of second wave feminism was the history of women's participation in the antifascist Resistance – a founding myth of socialist Yugoslavia and of republican Italy – beginning to be investigated in depth, through archival research and through oral history (Sklevicky 1989a; Pieroni Bortolotti 1978b). As a researcher, I am the beneficiary of the feminist challenge to orthodox historiography about the antifascist Resistance in the Second World War.

There exists, however, a comparable gap within feminist history writing: while women's participation in the antifascist Resistance and women's involvement in the second feminist wave were treated as crucial events for women's history, the Cold War period in Italy and Yugoslavia was rarely researched. The Cold War has for a long time been considered a period of conservatism and moderation, in which women's political participation in state institutions or party politics had scant relevance for subsequent generations of female activists. In this chapter I argue that this vision of Cold War women's lack of political agency is itself an 'invented tradition', which risks obscuring the radical genealogies of European feminism in Western and Eastern Europe, and the multilayered character of women's activism in the Cold War period. I also argue for the need to overcome a strictly national framework when engaging with women's political activism in Italy and Yugoslavia during the Cold War.

In the first section of this chapter I provide a literature review of women's and feminist history in Italy and the former Yugoslavia. I particularly examine the influence that second wave feminism had on the writing of women's history of the antifascist Resistance and of the Cold War period. In the next sections I address current scholarly debates on Cold War women's activism, as well as current debates about European feminist genealogies, which have deconstructed an image of post-socialist, Eastern European women as absolutely "different" from their Western counterparts. I also reflect on the importance of new historical studies of the Cold War, as well as of post-socialist and post-colonial studies for this research, and finally provide a detailed account of the methodological framework chosen for this book.



## 1. Women's history in Italy, Yugoslavia and the Italo-Yugoslav border area

### 1.1. Temporalities: the antifascist foremothers and the feminist generation

In short, the history which Yugoslav children are taught is the history of wars, uprisings, and conflicts (...) [m]en stand up proudly on the stage of history in their own right, illustrated by the relative variety of their activities and occupations, while women are in the majority of cases depicted as wives, mothers, daughters, old women; in the most positive case, as fellow travellers. (Lydia Sklevicky 1989a: 70)

The “women of the Resistance” were always “mothers and spouses” of the house, performing a double work, a double duty, and if nobody spoke of a double death, it was only because in the world one dies – even women – only once. And they liked the family as it was; they abhorred abortion, they hadn't even desired the right to vote, so that, ultimately, if these allegations are to be taken seriously, we cannot understand why they sided with the antifascists... (Franca Pieroni Bortolotti 1978a: 9-10)

In the late 1970s and 1980s the prevailing image of women who had taken part in the antifascist Resistance in Yugoslavia and Italy was a “pacified”, reassuring one, in which women appeared only as mothers, spouses, daughters of heroes, or as sacrificial martyrs (Sklevicky 1989a; Pieroni-Bortolotti 1978a; Rossi-Doria 2000). Feminist historians in Yugoslavia and Italy interrogated the erasure of women's agency from the dominant historiography of the Resistance. In this way, they questioned the public memory of the antifascist Resistance, a founding myth of the Yugoslav and Italian postwar political systems.

Italy after 1968 saw a veritable boom of historical publications related to women's participation in the antifascist Resistance and to women's engagements in politics. Feminist groups coexisted with student movements and with the groups of the “extra parliamentary” left. This opened up an intellectual and political space for historical research on subaltern subjects. The anti-authoritarian turn of the new social movements inspired pioneering studies of women, peasants, Southern workers, factory workers, mental patients, prisoners, and so on (Passerini 1992, 1996, 1998, 2011; Pieroni Bortolotti, 1978b). The oral history publications of these years were aimed at recovering the personal voices and life stories of female partisans (Bruzzone and Farina 1976; Guidetti Serra 1977), as well as the voices of female party militants and antifascist leaders (Scroppo 1979; Lilli and Valentini 1979). These feminist initiatives dovetailed with the more institutional historiography and official commemorations of the antifascist Resistance.<sup>6</sup>

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6 An important conference on women in the antifascist Resistance in the region of Emilia-

In Yugoslavia, the emergence of social movements and grassroots activism after 1968 was more limited due to the specific authoritarian organization of the socialist state. The critique of socialist authorities was less likely to be expressed through innovations in historical narration, a domain that was traditionally monopolized by the state authorities. Dissident critiques were expressed instead through a return to left-wing Marxist philosophy, via the dissident circle formed around the *Praxis* journal (Sher 1977), as well as through experimental artistic practice (Đuric and Šuvaković 2003) and film-making, notably through a series of experimental, desecrating movies, which became known as “the Black Wave” (Kirn, Sekulić and Testen 2011). Dissident circles rarely discussed feminism and were in fact often reproducing patriarchal stereotypes (Slapšak 2002; Žikić 2010). Apart from Sklevicky’s pioneering archival research, other historical works on women’s participation in the Yugoslav Resistance maintained an ideological, hagiographic character throughout the 1970s, and did not focus in any way on women’s subjective experiences (Batinić 2009: 8; Verginella 2009).

Despite these political and social differences, however, in both countries the main “moral authority” over antifascist memory still belonged, in the 1970s, to the political parties that were considered the heirs of the antifascist Resistance. These were the League of Communists in Yugoslavia, at the head of the state apparatus, and the Communist Party in Italy, which, by the late 1970s, had become partially integrated within state institutions through its strategy of “historical compromise” with the Christian-Democracy (Rutar 2007; Sassoon 2003). In both countries, communist parties represented the “reason of the state” in the eyes of the new social and dissident movements born after 1968, whose demonstrations and demands had been regularly condemned and repressed by national and local authorities.<sup>7</sup>

Feminist activists, notably, faced the condemnation of feminism by state authorities, and the conservatism of the official left when it came to burning issues such as divorce and abortion bills in Italy, or when it came to the widening gap between juridical equality and women’s everyday lives in Yugoslavia.<sup>8</sup> In the discussions on the “women’s question”, second wave feminists were confronted with the moral authority of their older antifascist foremothers, affiliated to political parties well as to official

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Romagna was organized in 1977. Leading women’s historians of the time, communist Franca Pieroni Bortolotti and Christian-Democrat Paola Gaiotti de Biase, edited the three volumes of conference proceedings. See Pieroni Bortolotti (1978a) and Gaiotti de Biase (1978).

<sup>7</sup> About 1968 in Italy and Yugoslavia, see Klimke and Scharloth (2008); about student protests and 1968 in Yugoslavia, see Pervan (1978); see also Tomic and Atanackovic (2009); about Italy’s social movements during after 1968, see Lumley (1990).

<sup>8</sup> See Bonfiglioli (2008). About feminist movements in Italy, see the recent anthology curated by Bertilotti and Scattigno (2005). About the gap between formal equality and women’s everyday lives in socialist Yugoslavia, see Meznarić (1985), Woodward (1985) and Ramet (1997).

women's organizations, such as the Conference for the Social Activities of Women of Yugoslavia (KDAŽ)<sup>9</sup> and the Union of Italian Women (UDI).<sup>10</sup>

While the generation of antifascist women was skeptical towards the emergence of feminism, which they saw as an extremist, bourgeois, overtly intellectual phenomenon, which risked alienating the majority of female public opinion, feminist activists perceived women's organizations such as the KDAŽ and the UDI as too ideological, moderate, and outdated in their bureaucratized and hierarchical functioning (Jancar 1988; Chiavola Birnbaum 1986; Bonfiglioli 2008). This generational divide was part of the "radical disidentification" of the post-1968 generation from the old left (Braidotti 2011a: 78), seen as complicit with Soviet imperialism, and notably with the Soviet military interventions in Budapest (1956) and Prague (1968). Because of these generational, political and theoretical divides, women's organizations affiliated to communist internationalism, such as the UDI and the KDAŽ, were never considered as part of feminist history, even if these organizations were considerably transformed due to the entry of younger militants in their ranks throughout the 1970s and 1980s (Hellman 1987; Dobos 1983).

As a consequence, the feminist reading of women's activism in the Cold War period – and of women's mass organizations – was necessarily filtered by their difficult encounter with these same women's organizations in the 1970s. By then, these organizations had become fully integrated in state institutions. The UDI and the KDAŽ claimed a continuity with the heritage of the Resistance, and their leaders were often the same as in the immediate postwar period. This made it very difficult for feminist historians to conceive of women's radical engagement in the Cold War period, and to consider early Cold War women's organizations as different from what they later became. This generational and political conflict led, in my view, to the "invention of tradition" about the lack of women's activism in the Cold War period. What appeared to be missing in the Cold War period in the eyes of feminist militants was, in fact, not women's activism – but rather a specific form of gender-based, non-institutional, autonomous women's activism based on theories of sexual difference – which came to be identified as the proper form of feminist activism in the 1970s.<sup>11</sup>

9 The main Yugoslav women's organization was named Antifascist Women's Front (AFŽ) until 1953. After 1953 the AFŽ was replaced by the Union of Women's Society (SDŽ), see Chapter 6 for a discussion of this transformation. In 1961 the organization was renamed into the Conference for the Social Activity of Women (KDAŽ), and this name was maintained until the end of the socialist regime.

10 About the emergence of feminism and the conflict with the previous generation of women in Yugoslavia, see notably Jancar (1988); see also Ramet (1997). About the Italian case, see Guadagni (1985), Zuffa (1987) and Hellman (1987).

11 For instance, in their second volume dedicated to Italian feminist thought, Kemp and Bono (1993: 5) write: "So you could say that Italian feminism started with women's movements after the Second World War. For example, one could cite the Unione Donne Italiane (Union of Italian Women) (UDI), the great women's movement which was created immediately after the war by left-wing women. But I [Paola Bono] *would locate the beginning of the feminism we are talking about at the end of the 1960s* when, paradoxically, the emancipatory struggle had been largely achieved..." [Emphasis added]. While forced to acknowledge the importance of post-

In Italy this became, in time, the hegemonic narrative of women's history, one that even antifascist women themselves yielded to.<sup>12</sup> The "non-institutional" stance of Italian feminism has been defined as its "most distinctive feature" in recent years.<sup>13</sup> In the successor states of Yugoslavia, however, the new divides created by the wars of the 1990s superseded these generational divides.<sup>14</sup> Post-1989 nationalist regimes attempted to erase the memory of antifascism and of multi-ethnic coexistence during socialist Yugoslavia. Conversely, feminist and anti-war movements from the 1990s onwards have re-appropriated the antifascist, multi-ethnic heritage of the socialist period, as a way to fight against nationalist discourses.<sup>15</sup>

## 1.2. Women's political history across time and across national borders

Having indicated in the previous section the reasons behind the lack of scholarly literature on Cold War women's activism, I shall now proceed to map out the available literature about women's antifascist Resistance and the early Cold War period. I discuss the existing studies and propose a new theoretical reading, which challenges current feminist interpretations. I point at the exclusions produced by these interpretations and argue for the need to reintegrate Cold War women's activism within women's political history in Italy and Yugoslavia. I also examine the confinement of scholarly literature within existing national borders, and argue instead for a comparative approach that takes into account the shifting nature of borders in this region of Europe.

As shown in the previous pages, second wave feminists' difficulty to identify with their antifascist foremothers was related to the specific political and generational power struggles of the 1970s and 1980s. The disidentification from former generations of women – and the relation between historical amnesia and feminist movements

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war women's movements for emancipation, the authors exclude these movements from their genealogy of "Italian feminism", since in their view the achievement of juridical and political equality did not eliminate women's oppression on a subjective and symbolic level.

12 As Pojmann (2005: 197) notes, "Italy's feminist groups certainly seized power from the older women's associations and have re-written narratives of the women's movement. The '68 generation is now in charge, in fact. The World War II generation is slowly passing." About the Italian case, see also the recent testimony of Luisa Passerini (2011). See also Chapters 6 and 7.

13 See Pravadelli (2010: 61-62), commenting upon Bono and Kemp (1991). See also Kemp and Bono, Introduction (1993).

14 The encounter between the antifascist generation and the anti-nationalist movements is best exemplified by the figure of Neda Božinović, former partisan and AFŽ leader, who joined the anti-nationalist feminist group "Women in Black" in 1990s Belgrade (Božinovic et al. 2001; Stojaković, Jankov and Savić 2002). About the tragic historical break represented by the Yugoslav wars, see Papić (1999). See also the conclusion of this dissertation.

15 About nationalism and historical revisionism see Kirn (2009). About nostalgia and the memories of socialism in the post-Yugoslav context see Velikonja (2008); Luthar and Pušnik (2010). A good example of post-socialist feminist re-appropriation of the antifascist heritage is Sanja Iveković's artwork, in particular *Gen xx* and *Nada Dimić*.

– has been widely debated in feminist and gender history. Laurence Klejman and Florence Rochefort (1985 quoted by Passerini 1992: 671) have noted that “amnesia is indigenous to feminism... asserting that it is born every time that it is reborn, feminism appears not to have a memory of past struggles.” Furthermore, Passerini (1992: 672) commented that “this analysis captures two aspects of the women’s movement: its anxiety to innovate and its need for repeated foundations, both of which tend to cut it off from the past, since it rejects antecedents of any type.”

Other scholars have pointed out that feminist discourses are inevitably bound up with a certain temporality and historicity, and that the complaint about the lack of transmission across generations is in itself a feminist fiction. To presuppose some forms of automatic transmission across feminist generations, in fact, would entail a generational, linear logic of time (Adkins 2004), portraying history as a teleological family drama, through a narrative of *loss, progress or return* (Hemmings 2011). The intervention I am proposing here, however, is not a complaint about second wave feminist paradigms and the lack of generational transmission or recognition, but rather a reading of the political effects of the emergence of the feminist second wave on the predominant narratives of women’s history in Italy and the former Yugoslavia.

What concerns me here is a form of selective amnesia, a partial narrative which excludes women’s activism during the Cold War from women’s political history, constructing a binary framework in which women’s spontaneous and radical participation in the antifascist Resistance is opposed to women’s institutionalized, moderate activism in the Cold War period. As mentioned earlier, in fact, feminist historiography in Italy and the former Yugoslavia produced a wide array of scholarly work on women’s participation in the antifascist Resistance (see for instance, Addis Saba 1998; Batinić 2009; Bravo and Bruzzone 2000; Bruzzone and Farina 1976; Casalini 2005; Gagliani 2006; Jeraj 2005; Pantelić 2011; Sklevicky 1996; Stojaković 2010, 2011). Women’s mass participation in the antifascist Resistance has, in fact, remained until today a crucial reference point for women’s and feminist movements in Italy and in the post-Yugoslav successor states. The feminists’ need to preserve a positive identification with the antifascist Resistance, despite the conflict with left-wing parties and women’s organizations claiming absolute authority over the antifascist heritage, however, produced a series of narratives that tended to separate the period of the Second World War from the Cold War period, thus severing political connections between women’s antifascist Resistance and women’s activism in the Cold War period.

A common concern of feminist historiography of both the women’s antifascist Resistance in Italy and that of Yugoslavia is the attention towards gendered discourses and gendered representations. Feminist historiography focuses on the extent to which women’s participation in the Second World War signified a disruption, or a continuation, of conservative gender orders (see next chapter). Generally, while women’s access to armed fighting and war zones is interpreted as a temporary and extraordinary disruption of traditional gender orders, scholars deem traditional gender regimes to be reinstated after the war, leading to a re-naturalization of the family as the basis for social, economical and moral reconstruction, and to a cooptation of women’s spontaneous political engagement within top-down, hierarchical institutions, such as politi-

cal parties and mass organizations – notably in communist-led Yugoslavia (Batinić 2009; Casalini 2005; Slapšak 2002; Sklevicky 1996). This narrative undoubtedly tells part of the story, but it also contributes to an obscuring of women's activism and of political participation in the Cold War period, since the institutionalization of women's organizations in the postwar period is often read as a form of cooptation within the male-dominated institutions of political parties and the state. This narrative is often reproduced even in those works dealing with the connections between the antifascist Resistance and the immediate postwar period (Sklevicky 1996; Casalini 2005).

This "non-institutional" or "anti-institutional" stance of second wave feminism in Italy and the former Yugoslavia (Griffin and Braidotti 2002) has led to an incredibly rich scholarship on gendered discourses and cultural representations of femininity, as well as on individual life stories, oral histories and feminist methodologies (see for instance Bertilotti and Scattigno 2005; Blagojević, Kolozova and Slapšak 2006). Women's broader political history, however, – particularly contemporary political history – had generally been neglected (Rossi-Doria 2010; Passerini 1991; Verginella 2009). Paradoxically, it is Anglophone scholars who have engaged in the writing of political histories of Italy and Yugoslavia, both when it comes to the history of the communist left and to women's political history.<sup>16</sup> Two U.S. professors, Barbara Jancar-Webster and Jane Slaughter, are the authors of the most systematic political histories of women's participation in the antifascist Resistance in Yugoslavia (1990) and Italy (1997). As for the Cold War period, women belonging to the antifascist generation have also written some valuable contributions to the terrain of women's political history in Italy and Yugoslavia (Božinović 1996; Gaiotti de Biase 1978; Pieroni Bortolotti 1978a; 1978b; Perović 2006; Rodano 2010).

Drawing on a wide array of new empirical material in different languages, I construct a political history of women's activism across national and ideological borders during the Cold War. Different bodies of scholarly literature, produced at different points in time and in different geopolitical contexts, are combined to construct this history. When trying to establish a transnational comparison between the Italian and the Yugoslav context, however, the problem of methodological nationalism<sup>17</sup> repeatedly became apparent. While some recent historical publications deal with the history of the Union of Italian Women and the Antifascist Women's Front of Yugoslavia in the late 1940s and early 1950s, they are generally adopting a regional or national framework for Italy, and, in the case of the former Yugoslavia, a framework based on the new post-Yugoslav nation states, i.e. Serbia, Slovenia, Croatia and so on (Casalini

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16 Two books dealing with the political history of Italian feminism were written by Canadian scholar Judith Adler Hellman (1987) and by Italo-American professor Lucia Chiavola Birnbaum (1986). More generally, the political history of the left in Italy and Yugoslavia has been the object of a long-standing interest among Anglophone scholars before 1989, precisely because of the exceptional character of the Italian Communist Party in Western Europe and of the Yugoslav system of self-management in Eastern Europe. See for instance Sassoon (1981) and Kertzer (1996) for Italy, and Lendvai (1969), Johnson (1972) and Rusinow (1977) for Yugoslavia.

17 For a critique of methodological nationalism, and for discussions about "methodological cosmopolitanism", see Beck and Beck-Gernsheim (2008); see also Braidotti (2011a and 2011b).

2005; Gabrielli 2005; Jeraj 2005; Liotti et al. 2002; Pantelić 2011; Pojmann 2008, 2011).

A methodological and theoretical inspiration for transnational comparisons came from a number of publications dealing with women's and social history in the multi-national and multi-ethnic Italo-Yugoslav border area (Ballinger 2003; Sluga 1994, 1996, 2001; Di Gianantonio 2007; Rossi and Di Gianantonio 2006; Rossi et al. 2004; Troha 2007). These recent publications show that the geographical unity of the "nation state" is not always the most appropriate one, notably in the case of the Italo-Yugoslav border area, where the frontiers between nation-states have changed in quick succession in the course of the twentieth century (see next chapter). In framing this transnational comparison I was also influenced by Anna Loutfi's theorization of "feminist geopolitics" (2009), and by her questioning of nation-states and national identities as a unit for feminist history in a region shaped by the legacy of multi-national empires.<sup>18</sup> I will come back to the problems of establishing transnational and multi-lingual comparisons in the methodological section of this chapter.

Before continuing to the methodology section, however, I would like to point to some other scholarly debates which have inspired this research and to which I wish to contribute. I shall discuss new research on Cold War women's activism, as well as post-1989 debates about East-West feminist encounters and European feminist genealogies. I will also refer to a new strand of Cold War studies marked by a "cultural turn", which is directly relevant to my own project, as well as to the possibility of combining insights from post-socialist and post-colonial studies in the study of women's history in the Cold War period.

## **2. Women's history during the Cold War: uncovering agency**

As described in the previous section, for a long time the Cold War has been characterized as a conservative period for gender relations, in which women's activism was practically non-existent. Transnational comparisons of women's activism during the Cold War have been rare (Duchen and Bandhauer-Schoffmann 2000: 1). The historical interpretation of the Cold War period as one in which women's activism was absent or irrelevant has been common not only in Italy and Yugoslavia, but also in other European countries, as well as in the United States and Canada. As mentioned earlier, second wave feminism contributed voluntarily or involuntarily to this interpretation, or "invented tradition". In Britain, Summerfield (2000: 18) identified a "transformation thesis", that is "the idea that the war had produced a modern woman" in 1950s

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<sup>18</sup> This reflection was developed by Loutfi in her work as a co-editor of the *Biographical Dictionary of Women's Movements and Feminisms, Central, East and South Eastern Europe, nineteenth and twentieth Centuries* (De Haan, Daskalova, and Loutfi 2006). A question posed by Loutfi is particularly pertinent for this research: "How valid is it for feminist biographers to use the nation state as a primary coordinate for organizing, framing and giving meaning to feminist history and individual life trajectories? And how can feminist biography that unambiguously frames its subject in terms of a primarily national identity avoid reproducing the unacceptable exclusions of class, caste, "race", ethnicity, social status, etc?" (Loutfi 2009).

and 1960s popular culture and academia. 1970s feminist historiography, however, argued for “the continuity thesis” between the pre-war and the postwar period, contributing to disseminate the idea of a gender backlash in the Cold War period. In the United States, the idea that women went back home at the end of the war and spent the 1950s as unsatisfied housewives became widely popularized, particularly after the publication of Betty Friedan’s *Feminine Mystique* in 1963. Friedan wrote about “the problem that has no name”, white middle-class women’s dissatisfaction with their lives as housewives and mothers in the suburbs, laying the foundation for second wave feminist theorizations in the United States.

As historians Rupp and Taylor have argued in their pioneering 1990 book *Survival in the Doldrums*, however, not all women abandoned public activism after 1945. Moreover, as Daniel Horowitz has recently shown (1998), Betty Friedan herself had been a radical activist in the war and immediate postwar period, and her earlier writings emerged from her engagement with antifascist and left-wing activism.<sup>19</sup> McCarthyism and anti-communism, however, violently affected the postwar progressive generation. As a response to widespread anti-communism, in fact, Friedan concealed the left-wing political engagement of her formative years throughout the rest of her life. The case of Friedan’s *Feminine Mystique* serves as an example of the widespread erasure (and self-censorship) of the important connection between feminist and left-wing movements in the 1940s and 1950s. It is thus emblematic of the forgetting of the “radical genealogies” of the feminist second wave as a result of Cold War anti-communism.<sup>20</sup>

The concept of a 1940s and 1950s “radical genealogy” of the American feminist second wave – and the concealment of this genealogy as a result of McCarthyism and anti-communism – has recently been advanced by MacLean (2002), in a review of renowned gender historian Gerda Lerner’s autobiography, *Fireweed* (2002). Lerner’s autobiography is extraordinary in many ways. In contrast to Friedan, Gerda Lerner decided to reveal in her old age what she had censored for five decades, namely her pro-communist and radical engagement in the Congress for American Women (CAW), the American branch of the Women’s International Democratic Federation (WIDF) –

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19 Betty Goldstein’s (who later adopted her married name Friedan and Americanized her first name) political engagement started when she was in Smith College and Berkeley between 1941 and 1943. After the war, she worked as a labor journalist, in the journal *UE News*, of the United Electrical, Radio and Machine Workers of America, a radical trade union (1998: 121). As a result of McCarthyism and of her disappointment with the left, in the 1950s Friedan gradually abandoned her engagements, working as a freelance writer and dedicating herself to her family in the suburbs. See Horowitz (1998).

20 The radical genealogy of second wave feminism is particularly clear when it comes to Western Europe: another foundational book of twentieth century feminism, Simone De Beauvoir’s *Le deuxième sexe*, was published in 1949. A figure like De Beauvoir exemplifies the connections between 1940s and 1950s radical activism and 1970s feminism. *The Second Sex* was criticized by both Catholic and communist commentators, notably for its challenging of women’s traditional roles as wife, mother and for its discussion of reproductive rights in a generally pronatalist climate. For an overview of the reception of the book in different Western and Eastern European countries, and in Serbia, see Jovanović (2010).



which was disbanded in 1949 under McCarthy by the House of Un-American Activities Committee (HUAC). Lerner, a Jewish-Austrian student born in Vienna in 1920, had emigrated to the United States in the late 1930s to escape anti-Semitism, and had gravitated to the civil rights and anti-racist movements in wartime America. Similar to Friedan, she could transpose some of her activist experiences in her scholarly work, becoming the first gender historian to write about African-American women's activism in the 1960s. Contrary to anti-communist assumptions against Marxist and socialist women's organizations, recent studies are showing how these organizations struggled for women's equal rights in a moment of social conservatism; these new studies are highlighting the connections between the radical women's movements of the 1940s and 1950s and the feminist second wave in the United States and Canada (Horowitz 1998; Cobble 2004; MacLean 2002; Storrs 2003; Thorn 2010; Weigand 2001).

In the previous paragraphs I have pointed at the ways in which American feminist history has focused on the rediscovery of women's radical activism in the 1940s and 1950s. In the next paragraphs I will outline other historical studies that aim at uncovering women's political agency in the Cold War period. These are studies engaging directly with women's internationalism, showing that women's organizations played a significant role in everyday Cold War politics, on different political sides (Brennan 2008; Ghodsee 2010; Ilić 2010; Laville 2002; Penn and Massino 2009). I shall contribute to this field, by addressing the activities of the influential left-wing woman's organization, the Women's International Democratic Federation (WIDF) from 1945 to 1957, from the perspective of its Italian and Yugoslav members. The women's organizations that form the focus of my research, the Union of Italian Women (UDI) and the Antifascist Women's Front of Yugoslavia (AFŽ), were in fact the national branches of this international federation. Throughout my research, I consider the shifting positioning of Italian and Yugoslav members within the Federation, and how this relates to the transformations of the Federation during the different phases of the Cold War.

Until the recent scholarly work of De Haan (2010a), Ilić (2010) and Penn and Massino (2009), the WIDF has generally been portrayed as a "chain of transmission" of Soviet hegemony during the Cold War period. Although the Federation generally promoted the Soviet line in foreign politics, however, the organizations affiliated as national branches maintained a great degree of autonomy from WIDF headquarters when it came to internal political matters and respective national loyalties. Even when engaged in Cold War internationalism, in fact, "national loyalty remain[ed] of primary concern for most women" (Laville 2002: 8). As I intend to show, the Federation was far from homogeneous, and different national and political positionings emerged during its various Congresses and meetings. Multiple forms of political loyalties coexisted: WIDF activists could be aligned to the foreign politics of the Soviet bloc, while fighting at the same time for women's emancipation and women's rights in their own countries and internationally.

Precisely because it has been perceived for a long time as a tool of Soviet hegemony, the WIDF has not been widely studied within histories of women's internationalism. In her challenge to this view, Francisca de Haan cites as a reason "one of the

most tenacious Cold War assumptions” about left-wing internationalist women’s mobilizations, namely the idea that Communist women “were merely using the notion of women’s rights for reasons of Communist political propaganda” (de Haan 2010a: 12). In Western anti-communist discourses, in fact, communist female militants were generally portrayed either as gullible, manipulated women, or as cunning, ruthless executors (for an illustration of this discourse, see the 1949 HUAC report on the Congress of American Women), but in any case devoid of individual agency, an agency that was unquestioningly attributed to enlightened Western subjects (De Haan 2010a; Laville 2002).

The conceptualization of communism and feminism as mutually exclusive ideologies is itself a product of Cold War mental mappings. As I will show in section three of this chapter, and in the course of the dissertation, Cold War political discourses were highly gendered, and the topic of women’s emancipation was used across both Eastern and Western blocs as a competing terrain of modernization and mass consumption (Reid 2002). In a Cold War mirror game, socialist authorities in Eastern Europe appropriated the theme of women’s social and economic equality, which they identified with women’s full emancipation; since patriarchy and women’s oppression were defined as byproducts of capitalism and class exploitation, feminism was described as a bourgeois phenomenon far from the interests of the majority of women. Western liberal discourses, conversely, defined “proper feminism” exclusively in terms of women’s political and civil freedom, discrediting women’s demands for social and economic justice as a form of communist propaganda (Ghodsee 2010).

In this Cold War mapping, then, women’s emancipation and modern female bodies became powerful symbols used in the ideological battle between the blocs. At the same time, as Helen Laville points out in her *Cold War Women*, “however important this use of women as symbols (...), it should not elide the actual contribution of women to international relations as active participants” (Laville 2002: 5). While being aware of the symbolic character of Cold War gendered discourses and representations, I intend however to focus on women’s political experiences and agency during the Cold War period. The following observation made by Laville could also be applied, in my view, to women’s Cold War history in Italy and former Yugoslavia: “While gender is becoming an increasingly central trope to studies of the Cold War, women as actors, rather than as symbols, metaphors and poster-girls for American democracy, remain elusive” (2002: 8). A number of recent scholarly works are highlighting women’s political agency in everyday Cold War politics, on different sides, and across the East-West divide (Penn and Massino 2009; Ghodsee 2010).

### **3. Trans-European feminist genealogies: challenging the East-West divide**

The second section of this chapter brings me to another strand of scholarly discussion to which I would like to contribute with my dissertation, concerning trans-European feminist genealogies and transnational encounters between women living in Western

and Eastern Europe.<sup>21</sup> This polemic emerged at the center of feminist debates after 1989, and has continued over the last two decades. In what is considered to be the first reader in European women's studies, Griffin and Braidotti (2002: 3) point to the fact that the migration of feminist knowledge has usually followed very specific paths globally, as well as within Europe, with a prevailing hegemony of the English language and a greater visibility of Anglophone feminist knowledge production: "This means that whilst the work of many American and British feminist authors is the object of widespread dissemination, feminists from (other) European countries struggle to get their work known." This imbalance in circulation and visibility is due to the greater institutionalization of gender and women's studies departments in the Anglophone world, and to the hegemony of the English language as the global *lingua franca* (Griffin and Braidotti 2002).

A further imbalance exists, moreover, between feminist knowledge produced in European countries belonging to the Western bloc and European post-socialist countries. Scholars who live and work in Central, Eastern and South-Eastern Europe have repeatedly noted the hegemony of Western liberal thought after 1989. Post-1989 East-West feminist encounters were marked by reciprocal misunderstandings, connected to the different gender orders and to the different life experiences of women in capitalist and socialist regimes (see for instance De Soto 2000, about encounters between women living in East and West Germany; about encounters between women from Eastern and Western Europe, see Blagojević, Duhaček and Lukić 1995; about women migrating from Eastern to Western Europe, see Passerini et. al. 2007).

Marina Blagojević (2009: 17) summarizes these encounters as follows: "(...) Eastern feminists were eager to travel to the West and to learn, and Western feminists were eager to "teach" and to feel the zest of the new women's movements. But there was also disillusionment on both sides, and some issues remained unresolved, almost twenty years after the first encounters." According to Blagojević, misunderstandings are "still largely unresolved, due to the fact that critical thinking and open debate about knowledge paradigms is virtually impossible within the framework of the vast imbalance of resources and power."

Western feminists who travelled to post-socialist countries after the end of the Cold War were often displaying a "certain colonial attitude and style" towards their Eastern colleagues (Slapšak 2002: 148). The process of discursive victimization of women living at the periphery of Europe increased with the Yugoslav wars of the 1990s, during which the entire region of the Balkans became "orientalized" in Western political and media discourses.<sup>22</sup> Since the Yugoslav wars (1992-1995), gender regimes and women's lives in the former Yugoslavia have been the object of transnational media and feminist attention. War rapes in Bosnia-Herzegovina, in particular, were extensively covered by transnational media and governmental and non-governmental advocacy groups. Gender and feminist scholars have produced a vast amount of literature on the issue of mass rapes taking place in Bosnia-Herzegovina between 1992 and 1995.

21 For a critical appraisal of the concept of Europe and European identity, see Stråth (2000).

22 See among others Bakić-Hayden (1995); Todorova (1997); Bjelić and Savić (2002); Kašić (2000).

Transnational mobilization and advocacy, however, were not devoid of tensions and conflicts. A pressing example of these tensions is the representation of war rapes in general, and of women victims of rape in particular, which has been a contested site of feminist intervention.<sup>23</sup> Generally, the language of gender mainstreaming, was imported in postwar Bosnia-Herzegovina by foreign NGOs and international donors (Helms 2003), on which local women's groups depended financially. This dependency was problematic since foreign intervention tended to impose Western assumptions onto local feminist groups and NGOs.

This imbalance in power also had consequences for knowledge production. Particularly when it comes to the former Yugoslavia, local feminist and scholars have often been treated as transmitters – rather than as creators – of knowledge – by foreign feminist activists, leading to a “shared feeling of exploitation” (Blagojević 2009: 17). Since the possibility to publish and to obtain research funding is directly connected to one's geographical location, this has limited the circulation of knowledge produced by scholars from the semi-periphery (Blagojević 2009). In addition, the post-socialist world is often treated as a homogeneous entity in Western publications, despite the great internal differences among the countries of Central, Eastern and South-Eastern Europe, and despite the fact that “the socialist world, or the ‘Soviet bloc’, was far from unified” (Slapšak 2002).<sup>24</sup> In Anglophone women's studies journals, for instance, the formula “women in Eastern Europe” is usually taken to designate a unified experience, often constructed on the basis of a number of generalizations extrapolated from a single country or region. Furthermore, Eastern “difference” is displayed and used to construct “Western feminism” as an equally unified category (Cerwonka 2008).

With my dissertation I wish to challenge the construction of this absolute “difference” between women's history in Western and Eastern Europe after 1989, as well as Orientalist narratives that place women's history in the Balkans in a different time zone from Europe, a time zone defined by “ancient ethnic hatreds” and gendered victimization. In my dissertation I treat women's history in Italy and Yugoslavia as an *entangled history* (Werner and Zimmermann 2006), investigating the impact of Soviet and Yugoslav conceptions of women's emancipation on left-wing women's organizations in Italy and in the Italo-Yugoslav border area. By underlining the interconnectedness of Cold War women's history across the physical and imaginary borders separating capitalism and socialism, Western and Eastern Europe, Italy and Yugoslavia, I aim to demonstrate how contemporary Western narratives about Eastern “difference” are themselves an historical, situated construction.

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23 See notably the controversy between Zagreb feminist Vesna Kesić (1994) and U.S. feminist Catherine MacKinnon (1994). About the different positionings taken by feminist groups and individual on this subject, see Batinić (2001); Engle (2005); Miškovska Kajevska (2006); Žarkov (2007); Helms (2003).

24 As Slapšak (2002: 147) reminds us, “In fact, very few qualities characteristic of a ‘bloc’ could be said to have applied to the whole of the Eastern and Central European area, although the crucial term ‘socialism’ was an identifier of all the states. The main epistemic problem today in researching the history of women in Eastern European socialist societies (...) lies therefore in the extremely dispersed, non-systematized and differentiated knowledge of both earlier and recent cultures of the area, its many languages, its semiotic and anthropological diversity.”

#### 4. Reading the cultural Cold War through a gender lens

In this section I shall discuss the recent developments in Cold War scholarship that are relevant to my research, namely the impact of the “cultural turn” in Cold War studies. In recent years, the field of Cold War studies has moved towards a comparative socio-cultural history of the postwar and Cold War era.<sup>25</sup> The Cold War is increasingly seen not only in its political and military aspects, but also in its cultural and ideological ones.

David Caute (2003: 1) has stated that “[t]he cold war between the Soviet Union and the West was simultaneously a traditional political-military confrontation between empires, between the *pax americana* and the *pax sovietica*, and at the same time an ideological and cultural contest on a global scale and without historical precedent.” Both the Western and the Eastern bloc reclaimed the heritage of European Enlightenment in terms of progress and modernization ideals, while addressing themselves to their internal mass constituency through mass media and cultural institutions in order to persuade them of the superiority of their mode of life. To quote Caute again (2003: 4), “the USSR and the USA both strove, in this ‘century of the masses’, to out-educate, out-perform, out-write, out-produce, out-argue, outshine the other.” Scholars are thus increasingly employing the concept of “cultural Cold War”.<sup>26</sup>

The reflections on the Cold War as a cultural contest have been taken up by Susan Buck-Morss in her work *Dreamworld and catastrophe: the passing of mass utopia in East and West* (2000). Buck-Morss argues: “the construction of mass utopia was the dream of the twentieth century. It was the driving ideological force of industrial modernization in both its capitalist and socialist forms” (2000:ix). Her thesis is that both the “East” and in the “West” shared a similar faith in the modernizing project. At the same time, each “dreamworld” offered the possibility to conceive of an alternative system than one’s own.<sup>27</sup> The end of the Cold War, hence, was not just a replacement

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25 See for instance Major and Mitter (2004). Major and Mitter (2004: 3) define “socio-cultural” as “an umbrella term to encompass the mass experience of events – social history in its broad sense of the ‘ordinary’ and ‘everyday’, but often in extraordinary circumstances. Likewise, cultural does not necessarily imply the literary or artistic endeavour of high culture, but popular culture and general mentalities too.” For a cultural and social history of the 1940s and 1950s in Europe, see also Bessel and Schumann (2003).

26 If the concept of “cultural Cold War” can be productive, “the increasingly inter-disciplinary character of Cold War studies has not necessarily contributed to a greater agreement on the main issues involved” as Scott-Smith and Krabbendam (2002) argue. There is a serious “danger that socio-cultural interpreters using a Cold War framework might read the Cold War into every issue, every event” (Major and Mitter 2004: 17-18) or the risk to look for “a cold war ‘smoking gun’ behind all cultural activity.” That is why I will focus on specific case studies and contextualize them, considering the Cold War historical and political framework, but also national and local frameworks retaining their specificity and autonomy within the broader Cold War setting.

27 “Dreamworlds are not merely illusions. (...) For critical intellectuals from the East, the existence of a nonsocialist West sustained the dream that there could be “normalcy” in social life. For

of formerly socialist systems with capitalist democracies. Rather, “this fundamental shift in the historical map shattered an entire conception of the world, on both sides” (2000:x). This led to a “shattering of the dreams of modernity – of social utopia, historical progress, and material plenty for all”, to quote again Buck-Morss, both in the former East and in what has recently been defined as “the former West”, i.e. post-Cold War Western Europe (Bonfiglioli 2011b).

This new approach to the social and cultural aspects of the Cold War open up a series of new themes of research that can be productive for historians and for cultural theorists, as well as for scholars of gender. In my dissertation, I discuss how Cold War discourses were gendered and at the same time I point at the way in which both Italian and Yugoslav women’s organizations were active producers of Cold War “dream-worlds” across borders. The field of women’s rights, in fact, was a terrain in which the opposed “dreamworlds” clashed (Ghodsee 2010). An excellent example of how a study of gender and consumption can shed light on the Cold War era is Susan E. Reid’s article “Cold War in the Kitchen. Gender and the De-Stalinization of Consumer Taste in the Soviet Union under Khrushchev” (2002). The importance of the Cold War competition in the sphere of domesticity and consumption is made evident in the famous “kitchen debate” between Nixon and Khrushchev, which took place during the American National Exhibition held in Moscow in the summer of 1959, in front of a kitchen cabinet.<sup>28</sup> Reid notes that “the domestic and conventionally feminine setting for this confrontation between the superpowers was not as incongruous as it might appear; in the context of ‘peaceful economic competition’ the kitchen and consumption had become a site for power plays on a world scale” (Reid 2002: 223).

## **5. Cold War Orientalism and post-Cold War ethnography**

The increased attention towards issues of cultural representation during the Cold War period has also meant the encounter between fields that were traditionally separated, the fields of Cold War studies, post-socialist studies, and post-colonial studies. A new concept of “Cold War Orientalism” (Klein 2003) has surfaced in recent scholarship, to describe the ways in which socialism, anti-communism and Orientalism intersected in different global theatres of the Cold War. Major and Mitter (2004: 7) note:

There has been a remarkable interest elsewhere in the past two decades in the concept of alterity, of the historical Other, particularly in post-colonial theory. An application to the Cold War of Saidian ‘orientalism’, originally catering to nineteenth-century imperialism, would be highly instructive. Whereas previously alterity was often metaphorical, the Cold War literalized otherness. (...) Cold War orientalism would therefore have to be compared and contrasted with the other distorting mirror of ‘occidentalism’.

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their counterparts in the West, the existence of the noncapitalist East sustained the dream that the Western capitalist system was not the only possible form of modern production” (2000: 238-239).

28 The text of the dialogue between Nixon and Khrushchev can be found here: <http://teachingamericanhistory.org/library/index.asp?document=176>

An investigation of Cold War Orientalism and 'occidentalism' in the region of Italy and South-Eastern Europe can complement the already existing field of post-colonial studies that have taken the Balkans as a case study. After Edward Saïd's *Orientalism* (1978) and particularly as a result of the Yugoslav wars of the 1990s, a rich sub-field of research has developed, examining the way in which Orientalist discourses about the Balkans circulated in the West and in Western Europe, from the Ottoman era until the present days.<sup>29</sup> Yet, in this abundance of publications about balkanist discourses and "nesting orientalisms" (Bakić-Hayden 1995), the Cold War period has significantly been omitted. Sabina Mihelj (2009) argues that "this blind spot is part and parcel of two closely related tendencies that long dominated the study of the Cold War: the tendency to avoid the discussion of culture, and the associated assumption that during the Cold War, ethnicity, nationality, and race were trumped by ideology, international politics, or class."

In her investigation of Cold War ideologies in the Italo-Yugoslav border area, Mihelj applies the framework of Cold War "divided dreamworlds" to Italy and Yugoslavia. She combines this perspective with an approach that takes into account "the persistence of older mental mappings" – such as the legacies of Fascist imperialism, anti-Slavic racism, and conflicting Slavic nationalisms. In my research I subscribe to this comparative perspective, by taking Italy and Yugoslavia as "divided dreamworlds" of modernization and mass utopia. Moreover, following the examples of Mihelj (2009), Sluga (2001) and Ballinger (2003), I look at the ways in which the cultural Cold War intersected with previous forms of nationalism and nesting orientalisms in the region. These were historical legacies of Fascist imperialism and the Second World War as a European civil war (Hobsbawm 1994: 144). In the Italo-Yugoslav border area, in particular, these historical legacies produced divided memories and competing historical narratives.<sup>30</sup>

With the exception of Sluga (1994; 2001), scholars have generally neglected the issue of gender and of gendered Orientalism during the Cold War period. In my study, I treat Cold War Orientalist discourses as a fundamentally gendered phenomenon. As Nira Yuval-Davis writes: "gendered bodies and sexuality play pivotal roles as territories, markers and reproducers of the narratives of nations and other collectivities" (1997: 39) By drawing an historical parallel between women's history in Italy and Yugo-

29 See for instance: Bakić-Hayden (1995); Bjelić and Savić (2002); Iordanova, 2001; Jezernik (2004); Todorova (1997); Wolff (1994).

30 A chief example of World War Two divided memory is the post-1989 Italian debate over the issue of *foibe*. These are natural pits spread in the Italo-Yugoslav border area, and came to stand for retaliations perpetrated by Yugoslav partisans during the Liberation of the area in 1943 and 1945 (since a number of victims were allegedly thrown into these pits). In 2004 a national "Day of Remembrance" for foibe victims and for Italian exodus from post-1945 Istria has been established by Italian authorities, officially entering Italy's public memory. On the other hand, there is no public remembrance of Fascist crimes and concentration camps for "allogeneous", i.e. Slavic minorities and populations under the Fascist occupation before and during World War Two. On this debate see Pirjevec (2009); Ballinger (2003); see also Collotti (1999). About post-1945 divided memories in Europe, and their reinterpretation after 1989, see Müller (2002).

slavia during the Cold War period, I seek to explore the effects not only of Cold War divides on women's political engagements, but also the way in which new geopolitical configurations were grafted upon previous nationalist and Orientalist ideologies, ideologies which were themselves deeply gendered. In the contemporary Italian context, the persistence of the label of "Slavo-communists" best exemplifies the entanglement of ideological and racist labeling throughout the twentieth century, and beyond.<sup>31</sup> The aim of this project, therefore, is not only to contest Cold War assumptions about "communist" women's lack of agency, but also to challenge Cold War Orientalism, that is the negative coupling of "communism" with the non-European, non-Western Other.

In combining post-socialist studies, post-colonial studies and Cold War studies, I am taking my cue from Chari's and Verdery's (2009) critique of the division between post-colonial studies and post-socialist studies and their invitation to "think between the posts", in order to write what they define as a "post-Cold War ethnography".<sup>32</sup> From the perspective of post-socialist anthropology and ethnography, Verdery and Chari note that post-colonial studies have remarkably ignored the once-named "Second World", while concentrating on the interaction between the First and the Third World. This is a long-standing result of what they define – after Pletsch (1981) – as "the Cold War division of intellectual labor".<sup>33</sup> Chari and Verdery therefore claim: "It is time to liberate the Cold War from the ghetto of Soviet area studies and postcolonial thought from the ghetto of Third World and colonial studies. The liberatory path we propose is to jettison our two posts in favor of a single overarching one: the post-Cold War" (2009: 29).

I subscribe to this plea by Chari and Verdery, and attempt to integrate insights from post-colonial and post-socialist studies within a single post-Cold War ethnog-

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31 About gendered and ethnicized representations of communist Partisans during World War Two, see Chapter 2, "Women's antifascist Resistance in Italy and Yugoslavia".

32 The genealogy of the two different fields is summarized by the Chari and Verdery as follows: "Postsocialism' began as simply a temporal designation: societies once referred to as constituting 'actually existing socialism' had ceased to exist as such, replaced by one or another form of putatively democratizing state" (2009: 10). On the other hand postcolonial studies emerged not after the sudden collapse of "actually existing colonialism", but "at least two decades after the highpoint of decolonization, as a critical reflection both on colonialism's ongoing presence in the project of post-independence national elites and in notions of nationalism, sovereignty, accumulation, democracy, and the possibility of knowledge itself. Over time, 'postsocialism' too came to signify a critical standpoint, in several senses: critical of the socialist past and of possible socialist futures; critical of the present as neoliberal verities about transition, markets, and democracy were being imposed upon former socialist spaces; and critical of the possibilities for knowledge as shaped by Cold War institutions" (2009: 11).

33 "Three-Worlds ideology provided a meta-theory, according to Pletsch, for carving up the disciplines such that the First World was studied chiefly by mainstream economics and sociology, the Second World chiefly by political science, and the Third World chiefly by anthropology and development studies. Among the powerful presumptions of Three-Worlds ideology were that the Second World could join the First if it were freed from ideological constraints, while the Third World might "modernize" if its "traditional culture" could be overcome" (Chari and Verdery 2009: 18).



raphy of women's activism in the Cold War period. This also allows me to highlight the multiple connections that existed between the socialist camp and the Third World during the period I analyze. This is even more evident in the case of Yugoslavia, which benefited from its non-aligned stance towards the Western and Eastern block after the expulsion from Cominform in 1948, and became part of the Non-Aligned Movement, federating anti-colonial movements in Asia, Africa and the Middle East. Both post-colonial and post-socialist studies can benefit from an approach that takes into account "the continuing social and spatial effects of Cold War power and knowledge" (Chari and Verdery 2009: 11).

The possibility to bridge the divides between different geopolitical contexts, and between different epistemological fields in the post-Cold War period, is also theorized by Rada Iveković (2010) in her inspiring work about the politics of translation. *Translation* is intended here not only as a linguistic process, but also as a conscious political effort to overcome long-standing epistemological borders and normative exclusions which are constitutive of modern political systems. As Iveković argues (2010: 47), "[i]t is not merely a matter of 'learning' foreign languages. It is a matter of operating multiple entry points into systems in order to be able to converse and translate from one episteme to another, in a postcolonial and post-Cold War situation and under conditions of utter inequality of languages (...). I call such work *translation*." Throughout this dissertation I adopt this broader, political concept of translation, using various multi-lingual sources as "entry points" into different geopolitical and epistemological systems, in order to build a transnational, multi-lingual narration of women's activism in the Cold War period.

## 6. Research methodology

In this section I will account for my methodological choices in the dissertation, reflecting on the research process and on the criteria used to select and process the empirical material. I will explain the choice for archival research and the decision to complement the archival documents with other types of source material, such as oral history interviews, biographies and autobiographies, offering a reflection on the potentiality and limits of the different types of sources. The stylistic choice for an historical narration will be accounted for, as well as the ways in which this monolingual historical narration was produced through a process of selection and translation of a variety of sources in different languages. It is important to point out here that this dissertation, while based on empirical sources, is nonetheless a *subjective, situated narration of the past*, and not an objective representation of the past itself. In this sense, what I offer in this dissertation is my own *narration* of the past-as-history (Munslow 2007).

The research questions of the dissertation were substantially transformed in the course of empirical research. The experimental aspects of the dissertation (trans-national comparison, multi-lingual sources, interdisciplinary approach) led me to adapt my analytical methods and narrative choices to the empirical sources, on the basis of a constant process of self-reflection on my own personal and scholarly location.

Towards the end of this section I shall reflect on my own post-Cold War, feminist *location*, and reflect on the tensions that arise when investigating forms of subjectivity and agency that belong to women of another generation (Passerini 1991, 1998; Scott 2010). I will also account for my transnational, multi-lingual position, and reflect on what it meant to conduct such a study of Southern and South-Eastern Europe while based in the Netherlands. I will come back to issues of language, narration and location throughout this section.

### 6.1. Designing a research method

Women's and feminist history in Italy and in the former Yugoslavia is generally framed within the borders of the nation-state, even when these national and ethnic borders have been constantly changing over the centuries. In the case of the former Yugoslavia, this was especially the case in the last twenty years. While the existing literature is very rich on the subject of women's participation in the antifascist Resistance and there are also many accounts of second wave feminist movements in Yugoslavia and Italy, the context of the Cold War has, as I have stated, scarcely been researched, particularly when it comes to transnational connections between female militants in the Cold War period. I have had, therefore, to design an interdisciplinary, transnational research method in order to respond to my own interdisciplinary, transnational research questions: which forms of women's activism existed in Italy and Yugoslavia in the Cold War period? Which connections were established between Italian and Yugoslav antifascist women's organizations in the Cold War period? In which way did Italian and Yugoslav antifascist women's organizations contribute to women's equality and emancipation in their respective countries?

This interdisciplinary research is placed at the intersection of women's and feminist history, Cold War political history, gender theory, and post-socialist studies. Before starting this dissertation, however, I had no previous training in contemporary history or in methodologies of historical research. My own scholarly background is in political science and gender studies, and during my graduate studies I started to become interested in oral history. I made use of a combination of feminist methodologies and oral history interviews (Gluck 1996; Ramazanoglu and Holland 2002; Passerini 1991, 1998; Portelli 1998) for my Master's thesis on the international feminist conference "Comrade Woman", held in Belgrade in 1978 (Bonfiglioli 2008).

For the current project, however, it soon became clear that due to the scarcity of secondary literature on women's activism in Cold War Italy and Yugoslavia – and due to the advanced age of female protagonists of the antifascist Resistance – an historical exploration of archival sources was a necessary step. The choice for archival research is also dictated by the transnational framework of the research, and by the large chronological span adopted. While oral history interviews had been extremely useful in uncovering the atmosphere and the impression of a specific event like a past feminist conference, the method of oral history presented a number of limits when wanting to reconstruct "what really happened" (Portelli 1998) in terms of women's

activism in the postwar period. The historical, geopolitical and ideological context in which Cold War women's activism was situated was likely to be affected by a number of successive "epistemological breaks"<sup>34</sup> (second wave feminism, the end of the Cold War, the break-up of Yugoslavia), which would have definitely affected the way in which Cold War activism is retold and remembered. Of course, I am constructing the transnational framework of the research, on the basis of my own positioning and scholarly background, and I am aware of the risk of superimposing this framework onto the experiences and perceptions of former antifascist activists, who were mainly attached to a "national" or "local" political framework.<sup>35</sup>

While still including oral history interviews, biographies and autobiographies to guide my historical interpretation of the Cold War women's activism in relation to more recent historical developments, I decided therefore to rely mainly on historical, empirical research based on archival documents, with the aim of reconstructing an historical narrative about women's experiences in Cold War Italy and Yugoslavia. I treated archival, published and oral history sources in a complementary, non-hierarchical way, as means to construct a story that was not yet there. Sometimes the archival documents were "silent" or limited on certain issues, while interviews or autobiographies allowed me to uncover those silences and provided the missing links I was looking for.

In the following paragraphs I will provide an overview of the archival institutions I visited and of the type of archival sources I selected, reflecting on their potential and their limits. I will also elaborate on the ways in which archival sources, as well as oral history interviews and autobiographical sources were analyzed and combined within a single historical narrative.

## 6.2. Visits to archives in Italy and the former Yugoslavia

While living in the Netherlands, throughout the four years of my study I undertook several fieldwork trips to collect material for the research and to learn Serbo-Croatian

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34 I borrow here the concept of epistemological break, or *rupture épistémologique*, coined by French philosopher of science Gaston Bachelard. The term was re-adapted by Marxist philosopher Louis Althusser (see Balibar 1978). These major historical events implied not only historical and geopolitical change, but also a change in epistemological regimes of intelligibility. See Papić (1999) about the Yugoslav wars and Iveković (2006) about the end of the Cold War. About the need to translate across different conflicting epistemologies, see Iveković (2010).

35 When interviewing two former leaders of the Union of Italian Women (UDI), Marisa Rodano and Luciana Viviani, for instance, I noticed that the question of international relations was not particularly salient to them, since they perceived themselves mainly as having worked for political change within Italy. My questions on their travels to the Soviet Union, or on their reaction towards the expulsion of Yugoslavia from the Soviet bloc, were met with some silences, and pushed the interviewees to distance themselves from the Italian Communist Party's allegiance to Moscow in the postwar period. About the issue of silence in oral history interviews, see Passerini (1998).

(or Croato-Serbian).<sup>36</sup> One first element to take into account when dealing with archives of the Union of Italian Women (UDI) and of the Antifascist Women's Front of Yugoslavia (AFŽ) is that they are not located in a single institution, but rather scattered according to the political and historical legacies of the two organizations in Italy and in the former Yugoslavia. The distribution of UDI archives reflects the strong regionalism present in Italy, and the stronger diffusion of the organization in Northern and Central Italy.<sup>37</sup> The distribution of AFŽ collections reflects the division of Yugoslavia into six republics, and the transformation of these republics into nation-states during the 1990s. While the UDI national headquarters were located in Rome, and the majority of the material of the association can now be found at the UDI Central Archive in Rome, there are many other smaller archives in the main cities of Northern and Central Italy, hosting the archives of the local UDI branches. Similarly, while the holdings of the federal headquarters of the Antifascist Women's Front of Yugoslavia (AFŽ) are located in Belgrade, in the Archives of Yugoslavia, each successor state of the former Yugoslavia hosts the archive of the former republican branch of the AFŽ, for instance the Croatian state archives host the collection of the AFŽ Croatian republican branch, and so on.

The integration of the Antifascist Women's Front into the apparatus of the Yugoslav state had led to the incorporation of AFŽ collections within the national state archives of Serbia, Croatia and Slovenia, which are public institutions, easily accessible to the researcher. I had much more difficulties in accessing the UDI Central Archive in Rome, which is managed by the contemporary Unione Donne in Italia – now a women's NGO – and whose opening hours are limited by the current lack of funding which plagues cultural institutions in Italy. As for the archives of women's organizations in the region of Trieste and Gorizia, they are dispersed between the State archives of Slovenia, in Ljubljana, the Slovenian library of Trieste, and the Institute Livio Saranz, also in Trieste.

The first month-long explorative visit to the Croatian State Archives (*Hrvatski Državni Arhiv*) in Zagreb was conducted in July 2009, in combination with a Croatian language course. A three weeks stay in Rome followed in October 2009, during which I visited the Central Archive of the Union of Italian Women (*Archivio Centrale UDI*). During these two visits I collected data about Italo-Yugoslav bilateral relations, as well as the data about the main congresses of Italian and Yugoslav women's organizations, in the period from 1945 until 1978. After these first exploratory visits, I could design a chronological and thematic framework for the dissertation, based on both

36 While I am conscious of how contested this formulation has become after the break-up of the SFRY, throughout the thesis I use the old official formulation instead than the contemporary formulations Serbian, Croatian or Bosnian, since I am mainly dealing with archival documents written during the existence of the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (1945-1991).

37 The organization was particularly developed in Northern and Central Italy, as a result of the antifascist Resistance, and of the strong popular base of the communist and socialist party. Its presence was instead quite weak in the South of Italy, traditionally dominated by the Christian-Democratic Party. For an history of UDI sections in different Italian cities of Northern and Southern Italy, see Hellman (1987).

Cold War political history in Italy and Yugoslavia and on the history of the Union of Italian Women (UDI) and of the Antifascist Women's Front of Yugoslavia (AFŽ). The setting of this historical framework required a considerable study of secondary literature about the Cold War, about Italian and Yugoslav antifascist Resistance, about the history of communist parties in Europe, as well as about the political history of the Italo-Yugoslav border area in the Cold War period. I decided to include the history of the border area due to its significance to Italo-Yugoslav geopolitical relations. I particularly address women's organizing in the contested city of Trieste, namely the Union of Antifascist Italo-Slovene Women (*Unione Donne Antifasciste Italo-Slovene* – UDAIS). I explore the connections between Trieste (the location of UDAIS) and Rome and Belgrade, where the national headquarters of the UDI, and the federal headquarters of the AFŽ were respectively located.

Once the structure of the dissertation was in place, I undertook a longer fieldwork journey to the region, visiting archival institutions in Ljubljana, Trieste, Belgrade and Rome in the autumn-winter of 2010. In Ljubljana I visited the Slovenian state archives (*Arhiv Republike Slovenije*), which surprisingly hosted many documents in Italian about women's organizations in the border area. In Trieste I visited the Slovenian Library (*Narodna in študijska knjižnica/ Biblioteca Nazionale Slovena e degli Studi*), which also hosted material about women's organizations in the area, as well as the Institute Livio Saranz, where I examined the personal archival collections of communist female leaders Laura Weiss and Marija Bernetić, which contained significant data about the Union of Italo-Slovene Antifascist Women (UDAIS) and its connections with the UDI and the AFŽ. In Trieste I also visited the Istituto Regionale per la Storia del Movimento di Liberazione nel Friuli-Venezia Giulia (IRSML), which hosts primary and secondary sources concerning the history of antifascism and of left-wing movements in the border area. In Belgrade, I spent three weeks at the former Yugoslav archives (*Arhiv Jugoslavije*), collecting material on the AFŽ, its relations with the UDI, and their respective relations with the Women's International Democratic Federation (WIDF). I also paid a short visit to the Gramsci Institute in Rome, which hosts the archival holdings of the Italian Communist Party (PCI), and to the archive of the Women's International House (*Casa Internazionale delle Donne – Archivia*), which hosts the full collection of the UDI magazine *Noi Donne*.

During this second trip I could collect a much wider array of material, and assess the importance of these archives for Cold War women's history. Thanks to a deeper understanding of the Cold War era, and thanks to a considerable improvement of my command of Serbo-Croatian, I could now fully experience the "intensity of the archival encounter" (Robinson 2010), and be literally and physically immersed in another time and space, constructing forms of empathy with the women I came across in the archive, and making sense of dialogues and speeches from more than sixty years ago. The fieldwork reports to my supervisor became veritable "confessions of archive pleasure" (Burton 2005: 8) in which I would list my multiple discoveries, shaped by my own affective investment within the archive. As Antoinette Burton notes, in fact, "history is not merely a project of fact-retrieval (...) but also a set of complex processes of selection, interpretation, and even creative invention – processes set in mo-

tion by, among other things, one's personal encounter with the archive, the history of the archive itself, and the pressure of the contemporary moment on one's reading of what is to be found there" (2005: 7-8).

Once immersed in the pleasures of archival discoveries, I was also confronted with the complexity and the breadth of the material available. I therefore decided to limit the time-span of the research to the period from 1945 to 1957 in order to be able to analyze the various aspects of Cold War women's activism in greater depth, and in order to do justice to the multilayered and dynamic character of this historical era. This chronological limitation, however, was also chosen for reasons of historical periodization, both in terms of women's history and in term of Cold War history in Italy and Yugoslavia. The years 1956-1957 mark the end of the high tide of the Cold War, the beginning of the de-Stalinization process, and the reconciliation between the Soviet and Yugoslav communist leaders. These phenomena led to a new cooperation between Italian and Yugoslav women's organizations, after almost seven years of conflict due to the expulsion of Yugoslavia from the socialist bloc in 1948 (see Chapters 5 and 7).

At the same time, while limiting my dissertation to the years 1945-1957, I continued to collect material and information about the history of Italian and Yugoslav women's organizations in the following decades, taking into account the general developments and transformations of Italian and Yugoslav women's organizations during the different phases of the Cold War. I became particularly interested in the encounters between the generation of antifascist female militants and the generation of second wave feminists, both in Italy and in Yugoslavia (see earlier in this chapter). I also studied biographies and autobiographies written by antifascist women after the end of the Cold War (see later in this section). In this way I could assess how the historical study of women's activism in the Cold War period has been affected by different successive historical events and "epistemological breaks" (second wave feminism, the end of the Cold War, the break-up of Yugoslavia).

Once the fieldwork was completed, I ordered the collected archival sources according to chronological and thematic criteria, into five different sections: the first contains all the documents related to the local and international activities of the UDI, the AFŽ, UDAIS and the WIDF between 1945 and 1948; the second pertains to the material connected to the Cominform Resolution of 1948 and to its effect on Italian, Yugoslav and Italo-Yugoslav women's organizations; a third section deals with thematic documents on the campaigns for women's emancipation conducted by the UDI and the AFŽ between 1948 and 1953. A fourth section is dedicated to the national and international activities of the UDI, the AFŽ, UDAIS and the WIDF between 1953 and 1957, and a fifth contains subsequent material on the 1960s and 1970s. These sections, roughly corresponding to the different chapters of the research, came to constitute a new transnational archive in itself, to which I could come back for my analysis.

At the same time, I had already started analyzing the sources during the gathering of material on archival visits. For each of the archival institutions I visited, I drew up a list of the material I consulted and copied, selected relevant passages, and made critical notes. These notes later served as guidelines to navigate across the as database

of hundreds of pages of original documents I had copied. When writing a chapter, therefore, I would start by consulting the different information databases on each archive – checking for instance the information available on the year 1956 in the Zagreb, Belgrade or Rome documents – and so retrieve to the original documents for analysis, selection and translation.

### 6.3. Archival sources

In order to understand a distinguishing feature of the archival sources from the Cold War period, it is important to take into account the material production of these documents. This is directly linked to the organizational structure of the respective women's organizations. As historian Lydia Sklevicky has shown in her seminal work about the AFŽ (1996, 1989b), antifascist women's organizations were hierarchically structured, in a pyramidal way. A fundamental distinction was made between the politicized women who constituted the avant-garde of women's organizations (the "emancipated" or "enlightened") and the (peasant, working class or uneducated) "feminine masses". This distinction not only existed in a practical sense, but was also defined and theorized upon in the documents of the women's organizations, following a Leninist approach towards party work and mass organizing.

The hierarchical distinction between the leaders and the support base is an important determinant to the character of the sources examined in this dissertation. In order to make historical comparisons, I have focused on the documents produced at the national or federal level of these two organizations, namely the Central Committees in Rome and Belgrade, rather than, for example, on the history of the UDI in the city of Ferrara, or on the activities of the AFŽ in the republic of Macedonia. This meant that I have analysed sources that were mainly produced by the leadership of these organizations.

This focus was dictated not only by the need to compare the activities of the organizations at the national level, but also by my desire to study transnational relations across borders. The women elected at the highest instances of the UDI and AFŽ were also generally the ones in charge of 'international relations', and those who attended WIDF congresses abroad.<sup>38</sup> Despite the differences between the political contexts of the two countries, by comparing the executive bodies of the two organizations I could observe how a small number of female leaders tended to accumulate functions of authority both within their respective communist parties and within women's organizations. By *leaders* I mean those women who were part of the federal and national central and executive committees of the UDI, AFŽ and UDAIS, who took part in international meetings and delegations abroad. The fact that a relatively small number of women accumulated a wide range of tasks both in Italy and in Yugoslavia can be

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<sup>38</sup> Similarly, De Haan (2010b) notes that the available sources on the WIDF – published sources, but also personal documents, such as private correspondence – tend to privilege the view of 'key figures' within the organization, leaving aside the contributions of the 'masses' of ordinary members.

ascribed to the Leninist, centralized character of communist decision-making, and also to the constant lack of educated and reliable political cadres, particularly female cadres – after 1945.<sup>39</sup>

Women such as Maria Maddalena Rossi, Marisa Rodano, Luciana Viviani, Vida Tomšić, Mitra Mitrović, Neda Božinović, Laura Weiss and Marija Bernetić shared a similar position within their organizations in the postwar period. They established themselves as the ones in charge of the education, modernization and guidance of the “feminine masses”, promoting access to political participation and the struggle for citizenship and welfare rights for large strata of the population. The UDI and AFŽ female leaders differentiated themselves from their support base precisely because of their political training, their cultural capital, their ability to reflect upon the political agenda of the women’s organizations. Conscious as they were of the historical role of their organizations, in later years these leaders frequently took up the task of ‘history-making’: collecting and ordering archives, organizing anniversaries and commemorations, writing their memoirs and autobiographies (see Michetti, Repetto and Viviani 1998; Rodano 2008a, 2008b, 2010; Viviani 1994; Božinović 1996; Milosavljević 2008). As I will discuss later in this section, this production is most evident in Italy, while in the former Yugoslavia the break-up of the socialist Federation has led to a marginalization of antifascist voices.

Consistent with the hierarchical structure of the women’s organizations, the leaders of the UDI and AFŽ acted as decision-makers and mediators between the communist party organizations and the everyday needs of laywomen. Not only did the leaders of these organizations engage in a number of internal political discussions “behind the scenes”, but they also coordinated public, mass-based mobilizations such as national congresses and demonstrations. The focus on the sources produced by the leaders of the UDI and the AFŽ, therefore, allowed me to explore the different sides of these organizations. On the one hand, the public side of these organizations is reflected in the documents produced for the rank-and-file members and the general public during national or federal Congresses and meetings. On the other hand, one can infer the internal decision-making strategies employed by the leaders, from the reports of closed meetings (central committees, executive committees, republican board committees).

As Sklevicky emphasizes (1996: 72; 1989b), it is very important, from a methodological perspective, to distinguish between two types of sources:

- 1) The *representative, agit-prop* documents, such as the programmatic statements given to rank-and-file militants to foster the party line, the speeches given during mass meetings and public occasions, or the press produced by the women’s organizations (*Žena*, *Žena Danas*, *Nasa Žena* and other journals in Yugoslavia, *Noi Donne* in Italy, *Donne* in Trieste).
- 2) The more *reflexive, internal* discourse and debates, such as private correspondence, or the stenographic transcriptions of central committees, where the leaders

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39 I came across this complaint about the lack of qualified cadres in archival sources many times. See notably Chapters 5 and 6. See also Sklevicky (1989b, 1996).



discuss freely and are less limited by the official party line. Within these documents we find heated discussions and disagreements about the political strategies that are to be followed, disagreements that do not emerge openly in the public sphere. The internal reports produced by the intermediate cadres of the organizations, such as the leaders of the regional or republican boards, are also examined within this second category.

This distinction between *representative* and *reflexive* documents can be applied to another set of sources, namely the international correspondence between the leaders of Italian and Yugoslav women's organizations, and between them and the Women's International Democratic Federation. These "international" sources were often in French, the *lingua franca* of communist internationalism. While the statements given by the leaders of women's organizations during an international congress will typically be *representative*, i.e. more ideological, the internal discussions between female leaders of different nationalities tend to be more *reflexive*, i.e. more open and critical.

The national/federal and international sources reflect the hierarchical structure of the women's organizations, and the way in which UDI and AFŽ leaders positioned themselves not only in relation to their male party comrades, but also in relation to the majority of other women that they would like to represent or reach. This was in fact a heterogeneous group: rank-and-file members, "apolitical" women or women not belonging to any political party, Catholic women, working women and mothers, peasant women from the countryside, women from national and ethnic minorities. Within national or international congresses, however, the female leaders tended to speak in the name of "Italian women", or "Yugoslav women", or women from the region or the city ("Triestine women").

At the same time, because of the socialist and universalist stance of organizations such as the UDI and the AFŽ, and because of the pyramid-like structure based on the local village section/cell, the flow of information travels not only from the center to the peripheries, but also the other way around: the local and regional delegates bring to the national congresses a number of empirical inquiries conducted "in the field", informing the leaders of the conditions of the organizations in the different regions, cities and localities (see for instance Chapter 6). Even if the organization leaders produced the majority of sources I have analyzed, these sources nonetheless contain important information about – and sometimes the voices of – women from the base, for instance rural women from the South or working mothers in the factories. Whenever possible, I have tried to quote the (often *mediated*) voices of intermediate cadres, or of rank-and-file members (see also De Haan 2010b for a discussion on the missing voices of ordinary WIDF members from published and written sources).

In order to give a broader, more diversified view of women's mass participation in Cold War politics, I include the case of the Union of Italo-Slovene Antifascist Women (UDAIS) in Trieste. The study of this local antifascist women's organization, influenced by the AFŽ and the UDI, but shaped by the specific multi-ethnic and multi-cultural context of the Italo-Yugoslav border area, allows an examination of women's multiple engagements at the local, national and international level. In the archives of Trieste I had access to documents produced by local militants "from the base", including

the extraordinary reports of semiliterate working class women and housewives who traveled to the AFŽ Congress of 1945 (see Chapter 3). This helps give an understanding of the ways in which progressive ideas about women's internationalism and women's emancipation circulated not only across borders, but also across the different social strata, and across the different decisional levels of antifascist women's organizations (national/federal, regional/republican, local).

Another important topic to consider when working with archival sources are structural silences and omissions. While highlighting the functioning of antifascist women's organizations in the early Cold War period, and the power relations at stake in their functioning, the archival holdings of the UDI and AFŽ are, however, quite limited concerning the subjective, individual experiences of their members. Regarding traumatic geopolitical events, such as the Soviet-Yugoslav split of 1948 and its subsequent "intra-communist wars" (see Chapter 5), the archival sources are generally silent about the impact of these events on the members of women's organization. The silence is even greater concerning the issue of political repression and enemy making, and particularly about the political prison camp of Goli Otok, an issue which started to be discussed in Yugoslavia only from the late 1980s onwards. In this case there are alternative accounts extant, to be found in the post-Cold War memoirs of Eva Grlić and Alfredo Bonelli, former inmates of Goli Otok.<sup>40</sup>

In this section I have discussed the type of archival sources examined in the dissertation and pointed out a number of problematic issues arising during the analysis. In the next section I address the other types of sources that helped me to complement the material collected within the archives.

#### 6.4. Autobiographies, biographies and oral history interviews

This dissertation is based on extensive archival research. Nevertheless, oral history interviews, biographies and autobiographies have also proven a valuable additional source of information and interpretation. These complementary sources allow me to partly compensate for the silences and limits of the archives on certain specific events, such as the Soviet-Yugoslav split of 1948, or to delve more deeply into the individual life stories of some antifascist women affiliated to the UDI, the AFŽ and the UDAIS. Throughout the study therefore, I refer to a number of biographical and autobiographical sources on antifascist women in the former Yugoslavia and Italy that have been published in recent years. These sources allow an immersion in the atmosphere of postwar and Cold War political activism, and show history through the eyes of antifascist women who had been the protagonists of that epoch.

For Yugoslavia, I made use of a recent collection of women's life stories under socialism (Dijanic et al. 2004). I also benefited from Gordana Stojaković's biographies of

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40 A similar silence surrounded events and phenomena that have started to be discussed openly only after the end of the Cold War, for instance the mass rapes perpetrated by the Soviet Army in 1945 Berlin. On this topic and on the discussions it provoked in post-Cold War Germany see Grossmann (1995 and 2003).

AFŽ members in Novi Sad (2010), and from the biography of Neda Božinović, former partisan, AFŽ leader, and member of Women in Black in the 1990s (Stojaković, Jankov and Savić 2002). Another biography of Božinović was published in French (Božinović et. al. 2001), and Neda Božinović herself wrote a history of women's movements in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries in Serbia, which also contains biographical information (see Božinović 1996). Another important biographical source is an extensive interview with Latinka Perović, leader of the Conference for the Social Activities of Women (KDAŽ) in the 1960s and later a prominent member of the reformist current of the Serbian League of Communists, which was marginalized in 1971 (Milosavljević 2008). I also refer to a biography written by anthropologist Miroslava Malešević (2004) about her mother-in-law, Kosovar Albanian AFŽ militant Didara Đorđević-Dukađini. I retell some of the stories about Didara in Chapter 6, when I deal with the AFŽ campaign against the veil and for health sanitation in Kosovo in the late 1940s. For the chapter on the Soviet-Yugoslav split (see Chapter 5) I make use of the autobiography written by Eva Grlić (2005), a Jewish antifascist woman from Zagreb, who fought in the antifascist Resistance and was later deported to the prison camp of Goli Otok.

There are a great many autobiographies of Italian antifascist women published after 1989, containing rich material about the Union of Italian Women in its different historical phases. I consulted the autobiography of UDI leader Marisa Rodano (2008), as well as Luciana Viviani's autobiographical stories (1994). Other publications that I found especially useful are the autobiographies of Teresa Noce (1974), Ada Gobetti (1973), Rossana Rossanda (2005), Luciana Castellina (2011), Marisa Ombra (2009) and Bianca Guidetti Serra (2009). These personal histories by left-wing women of different generations, religious/cultural background and political orientations describe a wide spectrum of women's political subjectivities and experiences, from the 1920s and 1930s, through Second World War and antifascist Resistance, until the Cold War period. The autobiographies published after 1989, in particular, allow me to examine the subjective implications of postwar political engagements as well as the construction of the historical memory of women's antifascism after 1989. These more recent sources also give some account of the generational conflicts between the former antifascist leaders and the younger generation of "neo-feminists" after 1968.

In order to gain some more in depth understanding of women's political engagement in the Cold War period, during my fieldwork trips I also conducted five oral history interviews with women who had been engaged in politics during the antifascist Resistance and the postwar period in Italy, Yugoslavia and Trieste. Since the purpose of the interviews was to gather information about women's political activism during the Resistance and in the Cold War period, I deliberately focused on the political engagement of my informants, and on the major Cold War events that affected their militancy. I asked question about my interviewees' choice for political engagement, as well as about women's activism during the Resistance and the Cold War period.

I first interviewed Marisa Rodano<sup>41</sup> (born in 1920 in Rome), former partisan, founding member of the Union of Italian Women in 1944 and UDI president from

41 The interview was conducted at Marisa Rodano's home on the 16th of December 2009. I contacted Marisa Rodano through the staff of the National Archive of UDI in Rome.

1956 to 1960. She also belonged to the group *Sinistra Cristiana* (Christian Left), which became part of the *PCI* in 1945. I prepared for the interview using Marisa Rodano's recent autobiography (2008. See also her recently published history of the Union of Italian Women, 2010). My interview with Marisa Rodano, as well as her two recent books, were invaluable sources, giving me an understanding of the different political lines present within the Union of Italian Women, and of how the *UDI* changed through time (see especially Chapter 6 and 7). We also discussed the transnational connections established by the *UDI* in the postwar period. In her role as president of the *UDI*, in fact, she was one of the Italian delegates to the Ljubljana meeting with Yugoslav women in 1957 (see Chapter 7).

In 2010 I interviewed another Italian woman who had been involved in the antifascist Resistance. Luciana Viviani<sup>42</sup> (1917-2012), was a former partisan and founding member of the Union of Italian Women, one of the first communist female members of the Italian Parliament (1948-1968), and herself an historian of the *UDI*, whose national archive she contributed to re-organize in the 1990s (see Michetti, Repetto and Viviani 1998). Luciana Viviani published a book of autobiographical stories in 1994, which helped me to formulate the questions for the interview. This interview was particularly helpful in delineating the political differences between the North and South of Italy after 1945, as well as giving a sense of the complex encounter between the antifascist and the feminist generations in the 1970s.

In 2011, I read about a woman from former Yugoslavia, who had been a partisan in Emilia-Romagna, on the main feminist website of Bologna. That is how I was introduced to Vinka Kitarović<sup>43</sup> (born 1926), antifascist student and member of the Yugoslav communist youth (*SKOJ*), from Šibenik, Croatia, who was arrested and deported by the Italian Fascist police to a correction house in Italy, and managed to join the antifascist Resistance in the area of Bologna in October 1943. She was decorated with the grade of captain, remained to live in Bologna, and continued to be active in the *ANPI*, the Italian Partisans' Association. The interview with Vinka allowed me to see how antifascist women in Italy and Yugoslavia had already established cross-border connections during the Second World War (see Chapter 2).

In the autumn of 2010, I also arranged a meeting with Ester Pacor, born in 1952 in Trieste, member of the communist youth and of the *UDI* since the early 1970s. She is active today within the Trieste local authorities, promoting women's rights and intercultural dialogue through the local *UDI* section. In 1991 Ester Pacor wrote a Master's thesis on the Union of Italian Women in Trieste from 1943 to 1970 – which she graciously shared with me – based on interviews with *UDI* women from the antifascist generation, of which her mother was also part (see Pacor 1991). Ester Pacor recounted her feminist engagement for abortion rights as a young *UDI* member, and spoke about the ways in which the older and younger generation interacted within the organization in the 1970s.

42 The interview was conducted at Luciana Viviani's home on the 9th of April 2010. I contacted Luciana Viviani through the staff of Casa Internazionale delle Donne in Rome.

43 The website was [www.women.it](http://www.women.it), by Associazione Orlando, Bologna. I contacted Vinka Kitarović through the *ANPI*, the National Association of Italian Partisans. The interview with Vinka was conducted on the 6th of April 2011 at the Bologna central section of *ANPI*.

Illuminating on the topic of the encounter between the antifascist and the feminist generation in 1970s in Yugoslavia, was an interview with retired sociology professor Gordana Bosanac (born 1936) in Zagreb. Gordana Bosanac was part of the Zagreb section of the socialist Conference for the Social Activity of Women (KDAŽ) in the 1960s and 1970s. She is the author of a recent book on feminism as a form of humanism (Bosanac 2010). Bosanac's interview contributes to an understanding of the contentious interaction between the antifascist generation and the feminist generation in 1970s Zagreb. She spoke about the editorial board of the KDAŽ journal, *Žena*, in which younger intellectual women developed their own analyses and writing skills, before founding the feminist group "Woman and Society" in 1980.

As is clear from the above, the women I interviewed are themselves history makers and authoritative figures, who are producing significant interventions in the contemporary public sphere. The oral history interviews – together with their essays and autobiographies – allowed me not only to gather relevant historical information, but also to construct a political interpretation of the shifting dynamics and developments of the women's organizations in Italy, Yugoslavia and Trieste during the Cold War, and of the ways in which they are remembered in the post-Cold War era. It is worth noting that the narratives of my interviewees generally had a national or local focus, and that I was the one asking about transnational relations between the women's organizations in Italy and Yugoslavia. Oral history interviews, thus, gave me greater insight into the national specificities of Italian and Yugoslav women's organizations, while the archive material sources allowed me to map Cold War transnational networks of women's activism.

#### 6.5. Lost and found in translation: language and narrative

Because of the use of such a wide array of sources in different languages (Serbo-Croatian, Italian, Slovenian and French) and from different times, a constant, political work of *translation* across languages and across epistemological borders (Iveković 2010) has been a crucial and inseparable component of the research process. While adopting a comparative, transnational approach throughout the research, my national standpoint and my native language had nonetheless an impact on the research process. Whereas at the outset my command of Serbo-Croatian was limited, in the last two years of my study I was able to navigate the archives and to read closely the archive material I had collected in the previous years. While able to read and collect material in Serbo-Croatian, I of course still make fieldwork notes in Italian, my native language, and Italian archival documents, secondary literature and autobiographical sources remain easier to access. Moreover, the publication of autobiographical sources has been more extensive in Italy than in the successor states of former Yugoslavia in the last twenty years.

In order to compensate for this personal and scholarly imbalance in favor of Italian sources, I strove to collect more archive material for the former Yugoslavia. In designing the structure of the dissertation I attempted as much as possible to dedi-

cate an equal number of pages to Yugoslav and Italian women's organizations in each chapter, and to match a range of comparable information for each organization in the same chronological period. In order to make the text of the dissertation more readable, when referring to archival sources I give the English translation in the main text, and provide the original quotation in the footnote, so that the original source is immediately available. When translating from published works, however, I only give the English translation in the main text, and refer to the page of the publication in the footnote.

I have organized the heterogeneous material in a chronological narrative. For certain chapters (notably Chapters 3 and 6), however, I establish a thematic structure within the chronology, in order to be able to draw comparisons between UDI and AFŽ discourses on women's emancipation. In order to tell these forgotten stories, I have chosen a chronological narrative style. This style may often appear more descriptive than analytical or theoretical, but is in fact the result of a number of theoretical and analytical choices made during fieldwork research, as well as during the selection and translation of the collected material. I chose the descriptive style of the dissertation in order to construct a story about women's activism in Cold War Italy and Yugoslavia out of heterogeneous sources, a story which makes audible women's individual and collective voices.

The style I have adopted is undoubtedly influenced by my background in qualitative methods and oral history, and has been greatly inspired by the narrative style employed by Italian oral historians Luisa Passerini and Alessandro Portelli in their works. In a way, I treat women's voices from the archive as I would have treated excerpts from an oral history interview. Accordingly, the dissertation is a *subjective, authored narration of the past*, which is neither arbitrary (since it is based on empirical research), nor is it an objective, unmediated representation of the past itself. In this sense, this study remains my own *partial narration* of the past-as-history (Munslow 2007; Passerini 1991, 1998; Portelli 1998).

## 6.6. Across Europe: traveling locations

My own spatio-temporal *location* (Braidotti 2011a; Rich 1986), as an Italian national living in the Netherlands since 2006, and conducting research on Italy and the former Yugoslavia, undoubtedly shaped the making of this dissertation. As mentioned in the Introduction, since I was born in Italy and in Western Europe, I became interested in researching the former Yugoslavia in order to challenge the still ongoing Western – and Italian – “Orientalization of the Balkans.” At the same time, while living in the Netherlands, I became aware not only of West-East but also of North-South divides within Europe, and of my own position as “southern” migrant – albeit a white and privileged one – in the North of Europe. The current Italian “brain drain” (*fuga dei cervelli*), a result of Italy's high youth unemployment, means that qualified researchers from all over Italy can be found in all the major universities of North-Western Europe and the United States. Italian politics have increasingly come to be perceived as an

exception in the European landscape, grouped with Greece, Spain and Portugal as part of the “garlic lands.”<sup>44</sup>

In talking to my colleagues from the former Yugoslavia and Albania, I could find a number of similarities in our experiences of “two-tier” Europe, and in our projects of intra-European migration from the South and South East to the North West of Europe, in search of research funding and better life opportunities. But whereas I, thanks to my EU passport, could enjoy a high degree of mobility within the Schengen space, my colleagues and friends from the successor states of former Yugoslavia and Albania had to undergo all sorts of bureaucratic proceedings to obtain a visa and to stay in the Netherlands for work and study. The legacies of Cold War and post-Cold War events – such as the break-up of Yugoslavia – still have a great impact on citizenship rights, defining who is entitled to qualify as “European”, and who is not.

Even after living in the Netherlands for six years, when traveling to the former Yugoslavia I feel more at home than in Northern Europe. This probably has to do with language skills and shared cultural habits, but is also due to similarities in political life. The political radicalization of the youth and the polarization between left and right is much more evident in the South of Europe than in the Dutch consensual mode of politics. In Zagreb, Belgrade, or Ljubljana, I often compare notes with my friends on the degree of corruption, widespread injustice, class inequality and repressiveness of the state apparatus of our respective countries. As reaction to right-wing populist hegemony, historical revisionism and neo-racism in our countries, we are keen to rediscover the counter-memory of antifascism, working class movements, antiracism and in the case of the former Yugoslavia, the lived reality of multi-ethnic and multi-cultural existence in socialist times.

Due to the contemporary context of economic crisis and of increasing class inequalities, moreover, third wave feminist movements in Bologna and Rome, but also in Zagreb, Ljubljana and Belgrade have started to focus on issues such as neo-liberalism, labor and welfare rights, precarity and social justice, as well as on intersections between gender, class, ethnic and sexual discriminations. The theme of women's different class and generational positions is powerfully resurfacing in the debate about feminism(s) and feminist genealogies in Italy (Di Cori 2007; Passerini 1991, 2011; Fantone 2007; Toffanin 2011). Something similar is happening in the successor states of the former Yugoslavia, caught between the economic crisis, the corruption of local elites and the ambivalent promise of European integration (see the volume curated by Gržinić and Reitsamer 2007; see also the recent issue of the journal *ProFemina* on Yugoslav feminism curated by Petrović and Arsenijević 2011). A recent slogan by the *Cure* feminist collective for the 8th of March in Sarajevo stated: “I don’t want carnations, I want a job!”

I believe that my own connection with contemporary social and political movements in Southern and South-Eastern Europe influences what I am able to see and judge as significant during my research in the archives, and affects my openness to the “voices from the archives.” In a way, my own location entrains an empathic vision

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44 ‘Knoflooklanden uit de euro’, *Metro*, 8.9.2011.

towards the postwar, antifascist generation. Their fights, losses and sacrifices for a better world, and their faith in historical progress and social justice after a war that had devastated the core of Europe, appear once again urgent in post-Cold War Europe. In the next section I shall address the methodological tensions that arise when conducting historical research about women of another generation.

#### 6.7. Across generations: subjectivity and agency

As described in the previous section, my specific geopolitical, generational and intellectual location led me to develop a form of empathy towards the internationalist endeavor and towards the issues raised by women's organizations in Italy and Yugoslavia after 1945. Nonetheless, for the post-Cold War feminist researcher there are a number of methodological questions that arise when reading 1940s and 1950s sources about women's activism during the Cold War era. Since gender relations, as well as femininities and the shifting concept of "women", are historically situated (Riley 1988; Scott 1986; 2010; Jambrešić-Kirin 2008), concepts like women's *emancipation* or *equality*, or women's *subjectivity* and *agency*, have to be framed in relation to their historical context, without forgetting the tensions created by the temporal distance which separates the researcher from her research subjects. When positioning myself towards the antifascist generation of women who were active in politics in Italy and Yugoslavia – and in my assumption that women's emancipation and women's subjectivities are central questions – I am confronted with the fact that these concerns are not contemporary to the time of the women I research, a methodological problem already analyzed by Chodorow (1989), Passerini (1991), and Scott (2010).

In her essay "Seventies Questions for Thirties Women: Gender and Generation in a Study of Early Women Psychoanalysts", feminist psychologist Nancy Chodorow noted that the category of gender had a very different significance for female psychologists who had been active in the 1930s than it did for her or her contemporaries. In the course of her interviews, Chodorow observed that this older generation of women did not attribute a great significance to gender in their life path, while she was herself hypersensitive to gender, a result of her second wave feminist engagement (Chodorow 1989; Passerini 1991). Commenting upon Chodorow's work, historian Luisa Passerini argues that as feminist researchers, "we should be particularly attentive to our own normative models relative to gender, and accept the tension between us and the women we study, between our time and our culture on the one hand, and their time and their culture on the other" (1991: 193). The task of "restituting subjectivity"<sup>45</sup> to the women of the past, as Passerini argues, requires an effort of imagination combined

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45 Luisa Passerini (1998: 54) defines *subjectivity* as a term which includes «both the aspects of spontaneous subjective being (*soggettività irriflessa*) contained and represented by attitude, behavior and language, as well as other forms of awareness (*consapevolezza*) such as the sense of identity, consciousness of oneself, and more considered forms of intellectual activity. The importance of this term, moreover, is that it embraces not only the epistemological dimension but also that concerned with the nature and significance of the political."



with historical research, in order to understand “which sense is attributed by the historical actors to their actions, their lives, their thoughts” (1991: 190).

In positioning myself towards the antifascist generation of women who were active in Cold War politics in Italy and Yugoslavia – and in assuming the centrality of women’s political agency – I am confronted with the fact that this assumption is not contemporary to women I research. In the postwar period, in fact, women’s emancipation and women’s equality were generally framed as components of broader social emancipation, democratization and modernization, and not as autonomous theoretical or social issues (Božinovic 1996; Ascoli 1979; Gaiotti De Biase 1978). As I will describe in the Chapter 2, even women’s participation in party politics was often framed in the masculine gender, since politics was by definition a male domain. Femininity, however, was reinstated in the realm of family life and motherhood, a realm thought of as complementary to women’s engagement in the public sphere, even among female politicians. Another crucial value for both men and women of the partisan generation, was collective sacrifice for the party. An example of the specific gendered subjectivity of antifascist women can be found in a 1959 obituary about an important AFŽ politician, Angelca Očepek, written by AFŽ leader Bosa Cvetić. Cvetić describes Očepek as “a modest revolutionary, a good comrade, a gentle mother and wife” and praises her in a direct address: “your life path has been full of fight and self-reliance, and your life optimism so great that until the last day you have thought about the happiness of others, about your family, about others, about the party in which you were born and in which you died.”<sup>46</sup>

The postwar ideal of a complementarity between public and private roles, and antifascist militants’ dedication to party and family life, have often been read as conservative and moderate by the second wave generation of feminist historians, since women’s past individualities and subjectivities were subsumed by collective institutions such as the family or the party. In my own mediation across shifting temporalities, positioning myself critically towards the antifascist generation, meant, in a way, that I had to position myself critically also towards the second wave feminist generation, and towards their theoretical and political critique of the antifascist foremothers of women’s organizations.

While I take into account the second wave feminist critique of antifascist women’s organizations in Italy and Yugoslavia, and notably their critique of the non-autonomous character of women’s organizations, I feel compelled to situate their reflections in the specific historical and generational context of the 1970s, in which younger feminist groups experienced the patronizing attitude of older, former partisan women

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46 (“Skroman revolucionar, dobar drug, plemenita majka i žena – sve je to bilo očliceno u tebi Angelca. Tvoj životni put bio je pun borbe i samopregora, a tvoj životni optimizam tako veliki da si do poslednjeg dana mislila na sreću drugih, na svoju porodicu, na drugove, na partiju u čijem si se krilu takoreći rodila i u čijem si krilu umrla.” 3.6.1959.) In this obituary, revolutionary (*revolucionar*) and comrade (*drug*) are in the male gender, while mother and wife are in the female gender (*plemenita majka i žena*). These formulations can give a measure of the distance between past and contemporary subjective values and between the different embodiments of femininity.

within state authorities, women's organizations and communist parties.<sup>47</sup> Women's Cold War activism was criticized from a feminist standpoint because of its lack of *autonomy*, but this critical concept was itself a historical product of second wave feminism. As Joan Scott has recently argued,

It was feminist politics that brought "women" into view as an object of historical investigation. But, ironically, the project of creating a subject for contemporary feminism (an active, protesting collectivity, asserting its rights, seeking emancipation from oppression) tended to blur the lines of difference, whether temporal, cultural or social. "Gender" was meant to historicize and relativize women and to conceive of them as integral to history, not simply as agents, but as "women." The point was that the current subject of feminism (our collectivity) could not be projected retrospectively or laterally.

Scott's recent observations on the historicity of gender relations are particularly pertinent to my project. While I am constructing "women" as an object of historical investigation, the objective conditions and the subjective investments under which antifascist women became active in politics in the Cold War period are radically different from the conditions and assumptions that brought feminist scholars and activists to formulate their demands thirty years later, and radically different from my own training as a gender scholar in the post-Cold War era. To quote again from Scott (2010: 12):

"Gender" suggested that we had to problematize the very notion of how we came to think of ourselves the way we did. It was not self-evident that women were conscious of themselves as "women", not at all clear that "our bodies" defined "ourselves". There was no "false consciousness" about what it meant to be a woman (even if consciousness-raising was a mobilizing technique). Rather there were appeals to specific interests and experiences that, at a particular moment, got organized under the sign of "women". The questions were how and when that happened and under what conditions?

This warning about the changing historical category of "women" has been crucial for this research, in which I try to grapple not only with antifascist women's activism in the Cold War period, but also with the ways in which it had been overlooked by second wave feminist historiography. In which way did antifascist women define and frame women's emancipation after 1945? Which issues were treated as urgent and discussed, which issues were left aside? Most importantly, who framed the "women's question" at the time and for which audiences? In which way was the antifascist, universalistic framework of postwar women's emancipation reframed within second wave feminist historiography? Although I acknowledge the absence or the limits of

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47 These generational conflicts, however, are not clear cut, and a number of scholarly works have shown that the UDI and the KDAŽ in the late 1970s often provided the first site in which younger activists could develop their intellectual and militant skills, before "breaking away" as feminists from established institutions. See Hellman (1987) and Dobos (1983).

women's autonomous political organizing after 1945, and while I maintain a critical stance towards the dogmatisms, hierarchies and complicities that were characteristic of communist parties and women's organizations in the Cold War period, I believe that the forms of autonomous feminist organizing experienced in the 1960s and 1970s in Western Europe and in the United States cannot be taken as the touchstone of women's activism throughout history, projecting the subject of feminism, as Scott argues, into the past or into the future.

As I will argue in the following chapters, the absence of autonomous political organizing among the antifascist female activists cannot be equated to a lack of *agency*. The concept of *agency* has been recently revived by a number of scholars in investigations of female subjects that had been traditionally excluded from the Western, liberal imagination of feminism, such as "Third world women" (Mohanty 2003) and pious Muslim women (Mahmood 2006). Studies such as those by Mohanty and Mahmood contest the concept of "false consciousness" (itself derived from Marxist theory) that had been widely used in feminist critique to designate women who would act against their gender interests.

I argue that antifascist women's *agency* in the Cold War period is expressed through a number of political engagements, in which gender relations, class relations and national/ethnic relations are interrelated and co-constitutive. When reading 1940s and 1950s sources, what comes to the fore is my own academic standpoint, influenced by a training in gender theory, more than by feminist activism as such. As a gender scholar, I have been sensitized to a poststructuralist, intersectional approach<sup>48</sup>, which takes into account not only gender differences, but also the ways in which other forms of difference and inequality – such as race/ethnicity, class, nationality, sexuality, age – are intertwined with each other and in turn shape gender relations. It is with this intersectional gaze that I set out to study women's Cold War activism. This has been my way to find a scholarly and activist location between the postwar, universalistic language of class spoken by antifascist women and the language of autonomy and sexual difference developed by second wave feminist scholars.

Having said this, I am not trying here to propose a narrative of *progress, loss, or return* (Hemmings 2011), using post-structuralist feminism and intersectionality as a "better" method to write women's history. Instead, I am reflecting on my own implicit assumptions and standpoints, which have become the lens through which I could unravel women's political agency and subjectivities after 1945. Looking at the entanglement of individual and collective identities – and at the intersections between issues of gender, sexuality, class, age, nationality, race/ethnicity in the Cold War period – has helped me to show that gendered identities and subjectivities were never completely subsumed by the Marxist, class-based discourses that dominated women's organizations. Instead, issues of gender, femininity, motherhood and sexuality kept resurfacing in the documents and in the reports written by the members of the UDI and by the AFŽ.

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48 On intersectionality as a theory and as a method in gender studies, see the recent anthology edited by Lutz et al. (2011).

At the same time, since the leaders of postwar antifascist women's organizations such as the UDI and the AFŽ distanced themselves from "feminism", which they identified with an interwar "bourgeois" phenomenon, I chose not to define them as Cold War feminists, Marxist feminists, socialist feminists, or civic feminists, since these definitions would have sounded to them like a contradiction in terms.<sup>49</sup> Instead, I have tried to show how these organizations strove to foster women's rights and women's emancipation on the basis of a Marxist approach, with its implied faith in historical progress, mass organizing, and state institutions as tools for social transformation. By highlighting the very different positions of the leaders of women's organizations and the "feminine masses", I demonstrate that that different forms of femininity existed within these organizations, and that the leaders of women's organizations themselves constructed a sociological category of "women" that was far from their own experience as communist militants. While striving to show the limits of this hierarchical, top-down approach, I also emphasize the potential of some of the struggles led by Cold War antifascist women's organizations on themes such as women's welfare and labor rights, or against racism and against social injustice, struggles that have regained a profound significance in the current European context.

In this chapter I have given a literature review covering the main aspects of my chosen topics, and addressing especially the theoretical implications of history writing across temporalities, borders and generations. I have emphasized the influence of feminist theory in shaping this historiography. I have outlined current scholarly debates about Cold War women's activism, and about European feminist genealogies. I have accounted for the methodological choices of the project and described the process of data gathering from a wide range of sources. I have also discussed my own geopolitical and scholarly location as researcher, and the way it shaped my theoretical and methodological approach. In the next chapter I will embark upon an account of women's participation to the antifascist Resistance in wartime Italy and Yugoslavia.

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49 For a discussion about Eastern European "state feminism" see issue one of the journal *Aspasia*, no.1, 2007. As an example of the attempt to present postwar women's movements in Italy as proto-feminists and gender-based, see Tambor (2010) and Pojmann (2008). Interestingly, the proto-feminist character of postwar women's movement is constructed by overemphasizing the cooperation between women of different political backgrounds, notably between women from the UDI and women from the CIF, the Catholic association close to the Christian-Democratic Party. Tambor goes as far as claiming that "[t]he particular intensity of Italy's Cold War rivalries was subverted, critiqued, and even outright rejected by a coalition of women from both Left and Right", a statement which, in my view, obscures the fact that the communist/anticommunist divide was a crucial factor of political identification in the Cold War period.

## Chapter 2

### Women's antifascist Resistance in Italy and Yugoslavia

#### Introduction

They [the Italian partisans] told us: "If you want we can help you to go home. But if you want you can come [to fight] with us instead"...And I thought: "all Europe is on fire, people are revolting everywhere, so if I stay with you and fight with you, I will be fighting for my people, too." And I always liked that phrase (...)  
Actually, I feel flattered. I say to myself, "Look at you Vinka, at seventeen you were not stupid at all." <sup>1</sup>  
(Interview with Vinka Kitarović, 2011)

The Second World War was a total war, in which civilian populations – particularly in Eastern Europe and in the Soviet Union – were involved in armed conflict, foreign occupation, violence and mass death on a unprecedented scale.<sup>2</sup> Deportation to other countries was also a mass phenomenon, which brought away thousands of civilians from their native cities and villages. Like Vinka Kitarović, a 16-year-old high school student who resisted against the Fascist occupation in her hometown of Sibenik, on the Dalmatian coast, who was deported in 1942 with other eleven "subversive" girls from her class to Italy, and locked in a reformatory for underage prostitutes in Bologna. In 1943, thanks to a bomb alert, Vinka managed to escape and join the armed

1 "Loro ci dissero, se volete noi cerchiamo di aiutarvi per andare a casa vostra. Se invece volete venire con noi (...) Ma io pensai, è in fiamme tutta l'Europa, la gente si ribella dappertutto, quindi se io rimango con voi e combatto con voi, io combatto anche per la mia gente. E ti dirò che questa è una frase che mi è sempre piaciuta. Non ero mica stupida come bambina, tutto sommato. Perché non te lo invento, è così, e me ne compiaccio, dico, Vinka a 17 anni non eri proprio stupida." Interview with Vinka Kitarović, Bologna, 6/4/2011.

2 See the essays collected in the anthology edited by Bessel and Schumann, 2003, and in particular Grossmann 2003; Lagrou 2003; De Haan 2003. As these essays make clear, although the trauma of Second World War was later "nationalized" in the different countries, different populations were submitted to very different degrees of violence and persecution, with the genocide of Jews and the war on the Eastern Front as the most extreme form of violence. Differences in ethnic group, class, nationality, gender shaped the successive experience of displacement, as Grossmann shows in her brilliant essay about differing experiences of Germans and Jews in 1945 Berlin.

Resistance in the cities of Bologna and Modena, where she became a courier under the names of “Vera” and “Lina”, carrying weapons and munitions for the antifascist guerrilla. Vinka’s story shows how the lives of people in different countries could become interrelated during World War Two, and the transnational character of the Resistance to foreign occupation and Nazi-fascism. The Second World War was also an “international ideological civil war” between progress and reaction (Hobsbawm 1994: 144). Since all Europe was on fire, as she recalls, Vinka decided to stay and fight for the Resistance in Italy. After the war, she went on with her life in Bologna, returning to Yugoslavia only during the summer.

Due to the specific character of World War Two in Italy and Yugoslavia, women’s participation in the antifascist Resistance was a mass phenomenon that involved thousands of women of different classes and cultural backgrounds. In this chapter I provide an historical account that serves to introduce the rest of the thesis. In the case of wartime Resistance in Italy and Yugoslavia, a transnational comparison of the different militant strategies proves very significant, due to the mutual influence of Nazi-fascist politics, antifascist struggles and civil war in the two bordering countries. In the first section, I give a brief overview of the Second World War and antifascist Resistance in Italy and Yugoslavia, in order to show the entangled history of Fascism and antifascism across the Italo-Yugoslav border. As I will show in this section, physical and imaginary encounters between antifascist militants, men and women, happened already during the war, which involved forced and voluntary mobility of populations across borders.

In the second section, I describe in detail the formation of women’s mass organizations during the Second World War, looking at the parallel foundation of the Antifascist Women’s Front of Yugoslavia (*Antifašistički Front Žena Jugoslavije* – AFŽ) in 1942 and of the Groups for the defense of woman and for assistance to freedom fighters (*Gruppi di difesa della donna e per l’assistenza ai Combattenti per la libertà* – GDD) in 1943, which were transformed in 1944-1945 into the Italian Women’s Union (*Unione Donne Italiane*-UDI). For strategic reasons, the Italian and Yugoslav communist parties organized and encouraged different forms of women’s participation in the liberation struggle; women’s antifascist organizations had a large degree of organizational autonomy during the war period. I look at women’s different forms of participation in the Resistance in the Italian and the Yugoslav context, and at the specific role of the GDD/UDI and the AFŽ, establishing an historical parallel in terms of political and organizational strategies.

In the third section of this chapter, I juxtapose current scholarly debates on women and the Second World War in Italy and Yugoslavia, showing that in both countries women’s political participation in the Resistance remained highly controversial and ambivalent, creating a profound and yet uneven subversion of gender roles. Images of brave female fighters coexisted with figures of sacrificial mothers, more apt to symbolize national unity. “Women” as symbolic signifiers were crucial to nation building, but also to the establishment of a new social order. While the gendered representations of women in the Italian and Yugoslav Resistance have been studied in depth, the issue of women’s political agency has been explored to a lesser extent. Against interpreta-

tions seeing the transition from the war to postwar period as a gendered backlash, I argue that individual and collective experiences of Resistance were far more complex and heterogeneous than symbolical representations would suggest. I therefore explore recent scholarly contributions stressing women's political agency during World War II in Italy and Yugoslavia, a theme that I investigate further for the postwar and Cold War period.

## **1. The Second World War in Italy and Yugoslavia**

### **1.1. The beginnings of the antifascist struggle**

The entangled history of the Italo-Yugoslav border area and of this region can be traced to the end of the First World War, with the demise of the Austro-Hungarian Empire. Since 1919, Italy had expanded its North-Eastern borders to Trieste, Istria and part of Dalmatia, incorporating a consistent Slavic minority. With the instauration of the Fascist regime in 1922, the myth of the "mutilated victory" and of the unredeemed Eastern lands was mobilized by Mussolini to promote a violent policy of cultural assimilation towards Italy's Slavic subjects, and to justify an expansionist politics towards the newly founded Kingdom of Yugoslavia.<sup>3</sup>

The Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes (or *Kraljevina Srba, Hrvata i Slovenaca*) was formed in 1918 and it reunited the previously independent Kingdom of Serbia with the territories formerly governed by the Austro-Hungarian and Ottoman Empires, under the Serbian dynasty of Karađorđević. Belgrade policies of centralism, however, stirred the resistance of the other ethnic constituencies, notably the Croats, and finally led to the abolishment of the parliamentary Constitution and to the establishment of King Alexander's dictatorship in 1929.<sup>4</sup> Italian Fascist authorities further attempted to destabilize the Kingdom of Yugoslavia, by promoting ethnic divisions and by supporting Croat and Macedonian fascist and nationalist organizations such as the Ustasha and the Macedonian VMRO, who also had training camps in Italy. These organisations proved victorious in destabilizing the Yugoslav Kingdom when king Alexander of Yugoslavia was assassinated in Marseille in 1934, most probably with Italian logistic support (Conti 2008). Fascist imperialist politics reached their peak with the beginning of the Second World War, when Italy invaded parts of Yugoslavia, Albania and Greece.

Italy annexed Albania in 1939, following German annexation of Austria and Czechoslovakia, and proceeded to invade Greece in 1940. In April 1941, Italian troops were part of the Axis coalition of Nazi, Hungarian and Bulgarian soldiers that occupied and partitioned the Kingdom of Yugoslavia. The Axis occupied the territory

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3 About the history of Italy's « Oriental border » and about Fascist imperialism in the Balkans, see Cattaruzza (2007); Rodogno (2006); Conti (2008).

4 About the history of interwar Yugoslavia and the issue of nations and nationalities, see Banac (1984); Đokić (2007).

of the Kingdom by splitting it up among their allies. The Independent State of Croatia was established as a Nazi puppet-state, ruled by the fascist militia known as the Ustasha. German troops occupied Bosnia and Herzegovina as well as part of Serbia and Slovenia, while other parts of the country were occupied by Bulgaria, Hungary and Italy. Approximately 650.000 troops from the Italian Royal Army were assigned to the control of the Istrian and Dalmatian borderlands, as well as of the provinces of Ljubljana and Montenegro that had been annexed to Italy.<sup>5</sup>

In line with earlier policies of “denationalisation” and with a conception of Slavic populations as racially inferior, the Italian military government was particularly violent in administering the annexed territories.<sup>6</sup> A great number of people, mainly civilians, fell victim to the “preventive repression” against any possible resistance. This repression includes mass deportation of populations, concentration camps and burning and looting of villages. Only for the province of Ljubljana, 13.000 victims are estimated (Conti 2008: 70). The figures for the deported Slavic populations, both in the annexed territories and in Italy itself, have been estimated in the order of 60.000 –100.000 (Conti 2008: 70). The Italian Royal Army also collaborated with Nazi troops, as well as with the Ustasha regime in their rounding-up and extermination of antifascists, Jews, Serbs and Roma. They also sided with Chetniks<sup>7</sup> and Slovene anti-communist forces.

In this context of total war, the heretofore-clandestine Yugoslav Communist Party<sup>8</sup> started to organise a resistance struggle against Nazi-fascism and its local supporters. Joining the Resistance was often one of the few possibilities to survive the total war waged in towns and villages and the deportation for those who were targeted by the Ustasha regime because of their ethnic identities, notably Serbs and Jews. After the German invasion of the Soviet Union with “Operation Barbarossa” on the 22nd of

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5 A detailed reconstruction of Second World War in the territories of Italy and Yugoslavia is beyond the scope of this thesis. For a cultural and social history of World War Two in Italy see however Pavone 2006; for Yugoslavia see Tomasevich 2001.

6 “The emphasis over the Slavic threat, the dark menace implicit in the same concept of Balcania [Balkan land] and its usage not only for propaganda aims, as a synonym for every sort of wickedness, the reference to the “Balkan infection” that could not be cauterized strongly enough by any weapon: this became the everyday discourse of the press, the radio, the propaganda, and of military and political action” (Collotti 1999: 58).

7 A royalist guerrilla army of resistance to the Nazi occupation, the Yugoslav Army in the Fatherland – better known as the Chetniks – was constituted under the command of Draža Mihailović and initially supported by the Allies. However, while initially fighting against the Germans, the Chetniks also opposed the communist forces, which led them to accept Axis support in their fight against the partisans. See Tomasevich (2001).

8 The Yugoslav Communist Party – legally founded in 1919, gained quickly support (65.000 members at the end of the 1920), becoming the third main party of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia by 1921. It was outlawed in 1921, and more strongly repressed after the coup d'état establishing a dictatorship in the hands of the king Alexander in 1929. Internal conflicts and illegality reduced its members to 2.122 (100 women) in 1928. However, after 1935 the Party underwent a profound reorganization, and Josip Broz “Tito” assumed the leadership in 1936 (Jancar-Webster 1990: 24).



June 1941, the USSR launched an appeal for partisan resistance in Western Europe to ease the situation on the Eastern front. In the Yugoslav territory the Partisans formed the 1st Sisak Partisan Detachment in 1941, which was also the first armed resistance unit in Europe. On December 22 the first Proletarian Assault Brigade (*Proleterska Udarna Brigada*) was created, as the first regular Partisan military unit. The different Partisan detachments merged into the People's Liberation Army (NOV) and Partisan Detachments of Yugoslavia (POJ) in 1942. The Liberation Movement grew to become the largest resistance force in occupied Europe, with 800,000 men organized in 4 field armies. Since early 1942 the Comintern journal praised the Yugoslav partisan struggle, as the "example to be followed everywhere in Western Europe" (Urban 1986: 157).

The Italian Communist Party had also called for mass antifascist resistance after the invasion of the Soviet Union, and in late July 1941 Umberto Massola, member of PCI foreign bureau, first reached Milan, after having crossed the Italo-Yugoslav border (Urban 1986: 161). The first Italian partisan units were in fact formed in the summer-autumn of 1943. In July 1943, Allied troops landed in Sicily. On the 25<sup>th</sup> of July, Mussolini was dismissed as Prime Minister by the Grand Council of Fascism, and replaced with Marshal Badoglio. On the 8<sup>th</sup> of September 1943, the king announced that he had signed an armistice with Allied troops, which marked Italy's capitulation. After Italy's unconditional surrender there followed the landing of the Allies in the South, the confused disbanding of the Royal Army, and the Nazi occupation of Northern and Central Italy.

Even if Italian partisan units only truly started to operate in the autumn of 1943, the instructions about the formation of partisan units in Northern Italy had been drafted long before, and were deeply influenced by the neighboring "Yugoslav example". Under Moscow's guidelines, "the PCI clearly sought to comply with the Comintern's order to promote armed resistance based on the Yugoslavian pattern" (Urban 1986: 162). Immediately after Italy's surrender, on the 9<sup>th</sup> of September 1943 the main antifascist parties formed the Committee for National Liberation in Rome, and invited the population to join the Resistance against the Nazis (Ginsborg 2003). The Committee for National Liberation included the representatives of six pre-fascist parties: "the Communist, Action (progressive republicans), Socialist, Christian Democratic, Republican, and Liberal" (Novak 1970: 96). According to the "Salerno strategic shift" (*svolta di Salerno*), the Italian communist party agreed to cooperate with the other antifascist forces before deciding upon the question of the Italian Monarchy. In March 1944, Italian Communist Party leader Palmiro Togliatti returned to Italy from his Moscow exile.<sup>9</sup> At the end of the war, there were approximately 100.000 active members in the armed Resistance, and thousands of other supporters. The Communist and the Action Party troops were the most significant and best organized, outnumbering the bands formed by former army officers of royalist background, and Catholic and so-

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9 Palmiro Togliatti (1893-1964) was a founder of the PCI in 1921 and served as the chief of the Italian Communist Party from 1927 until his death in 1964. He moved to the Soviet Union in 1926 to escape Fascist repression. There he became a leader of the Communist International, and was sent to Spain during the civil war. In 1944 he returned to Italy, where he took part in the antifascist unity government until 1947. For an extended biography of Togliatti, see Bocca (1973).

cialist troops. The American and British troops, who backed conservative forces and the king in the South, looked at these developments with anxiety.

Even in Yugoslavia, the Anglo-American allies initially supported the Chetnik royalist guerrilla linked to the Serbian Monarchy in exile in London. Soon it became clear, however, that the secret Communist Party, reorganized into the Yugoslav National Liberation Front led by Josip Broz Tito<sup>10</sup>, was the most effective and organized underground force; the Partisans were also best able to gain the support of the local populations, since they promised to establish a new order that could be embraced by all the ethnic groups of the old Kingdom of Yugoslavia. The first civic authority within the framework of the National Liberation movement was established on the 26<sup>th</sup> of November 1942: “over two hundred Partisan representatives of various parties, organizations, and ethnic or religious groups met in the Bosnian stronghold of Bihac to form themselves into a Yugoslav Antifascist Council of National Liberation, known by its initials as AVNOJ” (Petrovich 1947: 505). Britain finally insisted upon the Yugoslav king to recognize the National Liberation Front – hegemonized by the communists – as the sole legitimate Yugoslav underground (Novak 1970: 91).

#### 1.2. Italian and Yugoslav women’s encounters across borders during the war

The echo of the Yugoslav antifascist struggles had reached Italian antifascists since the beginning of the war, becoming a very significant model during the Resistance: “the Yugoslavs exercise a specific fascination on the [Italian] communist and working class base, since they seem to unify in their struggle the three wars, the patriotic war, the civil war and the class war” (Pavone 2006: 305). Some cooperation between Italian and Slovene antifascists already started at Italy’s Eastern border in 1942, and increased after the 8<sup>th</sup> of September 1943. In a recent collection about women’s history in Trieste, historian Anna di Gianantonio (2004) argues that “many Resistances” existed in Italy, and that the specificity of the Resistance at the Oriental border was clearly determined by the influence of the Yugoslav model. There the struggle started much earlier than in the rest of Italy, also as a response to the Fascist politics of “Italianization” against the Slavic minority, which had led the local Slovenes to organize a number of solidarity networks under Fascism.

After the German occupation in 1943, the armed Resistance in the Italo-Yugoslav border area soon assumed the character of an underground guerrilla war, to which the Nazi commanders responded with counter-insurgency policies, terrorizing civilians and exploiting ethnic differences to their advantage. Di Gianantonio wrote the life story of the woman who is considered to be the first Italian partisan courier (*staffetta*),

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10 Josip Broz (1892-1980), known under his nom-de-guerre as Tito, became a soldier of the Red Army and a member of the Soviet communist party after World War One. He was the founder of the Yugoslav communist party in 1920 and one of its leaders until World War Two. In the mid-1930s he again spent some time in Moscow where he was part of the Comintern. He led the antifascist Resistance in Yugoslavia and became the life-long leader of the SFRY. He died in 1980. For a detailed biography of Tito, see Dedijer (1980) ; Dilas (2000).

Ondina Peteani (1925-2003), an 18-year-old worker in the dockyards of Monfalcone (a harbor town in the Italo-Yugoslav border area), later deported to Auschwitz and Ravensbruck. The decision to take part in the Resistance was influenced by a number of factors, such as class, ethnicity and ideological orientation. Slovene women living in Trieste and Monfalcone, for instance, were more rapidly politicized during Fascism because of the national and cultural oppression they suffered. During the Resistance, Slavic-speaking women often received worse treatment when arrested, as related by some Italian female comrades imprisoned with them (Di Gianantonio 2007: 73, 85).

Marisa Rodano, future UDI leader and Catholic antifascist militant in Nazi-occupied Rome, recalls in her autobiography that while she was imprisoned for antifascist activities, she heard from the nuns that “a group of Slovenian girls, very subversive and what is more, non-believers” was detained in the same prison. She imagined that “they must have been involved in an attempt at armed revolt that took place in Trieste or in the annexed Slovenian territory.” And then she adds: “I do not remember anymore if I saw them in person or if I exchanged few words with them. But I must have known something more, for in my memory a sense of unconditional admiration has remained vivid: they, they were real revolutionaries, they ran the risk of death penalty, they had done important things for the cause” (Rodano 2008a: 191).

After the 8<sup>th</sup> of September 1943, with the disbandment of the Italian royal army, many Italian men found themselves in the Balkans where they had fought as soldiers, and decided to join the Yugoslav resistance. According to historian Giacomo Scotti (2011: 7), there were around 40.000 Italian soldiers who fought with Yugoslav partisans. Many men and women from Yugoslavia who had been deported to Italian prison camps, moreover, managed to escape after the 8<sup>th</sup> of September 1943, and joined the Resistance in Italy. A recent volume (Martocchia 2011) dedicated to Yugoslav partisans within the Italian Resistance lists approximately 200 internment camps for Slavic citizens in the Italian Kingdom, with around 100.000 deportees from Yugoslavia in these camps. Around 500 Yugoslav partisans are buried in Italy. The book recalls the important contribution of Yugoslav fighters and other foreign soldiers to some first Resistance battles. Liberated Southern Italy, moreover, served as a military rear guard for Yugoslav communist activities, and hosted a number of partisan training camps. This history gives an idea of the imaginary and material legacies of Fascist and antifascist history across the Italo-Yugoslav border during World War Two, legacies which would continue in the postwar and Cold War era, as I will show in the next chapters.

Deportation during the Second World War was, as I have mentioned earlier, a mass phenomenon, and many antifascist women from Italy and Yugoslavia met – together with other women of different national backgrounds – in the concentration camps. I have mentioned the story of Vinka Kitarović, student from Sibenik, Croatia, who joined the Resistance in Emilia-Romagna after having experienced the Fascist deportation when she was seventeen. Another student from Croatia, antifascist Julka Desković, managed to escape Fascist prisons, and became active in the Resistance in the region of Bologna. She died in Ravensbruck<sup>11</sup> shortly before the Liberation. Julka

11 Ravensbruck was a women's concentration camp, situated 90 km north of Berlin. More than 80 per cent of inmates were considered political prisoners, and served as forced labor in

Desković's story has been collected in a volume that was originally published in Italy in 1978, titled *Le donne di Ravensbruck* (*The Women of Ravensbruck*). It was edited by historian Anna Maria Bruzzone and by former deportee Lidia Beccaria Rolfi, and it contained the life stories of five Italian women who had been deported to Ravensbruck female concentration camp for political reasons. It was in places like Ravensbruck that antifascist women from different nationalities met. Some, if they survived, like Ondina Peteani, went on to be active in Cold War politics (Di Gianantonio 2007).

The entangled history of Italian and Yugoslav antifascist women is evident in the friendship between Julka Desković and Italian antifascist militant Nella Baroncini, which started during their imprisonment in Ravensbruck.<sup>12</sup> After having witnessed the death of her mother and of her elder sister, and the displacement of her sister Lina in another camp, Nella Baroncini found herself alone. Lying ill in the infirmary of the camp, Nella became friends with Julka, who, she said, was like a sister to her. Julka was pregnant when she arrived in the camp; the father of the child was an Italian worker and communist antifascist leader, Renato Giachetti (1903-1964). The baby girl was born in Ravensbruck at Christmas 1944: "Once the little nurse of the new born babies even managed to bring her so that she could see her from the window: such a beautiful girl! She was called Slobodenka, which means free" (Beccaria Rolfi and Bruzzone 2003: 269).

The baby managed to survive thanks to the young nurse, until February 1945, when another nurse forgot the gas heater on, killing her and a number of babies placed in the upper part of the barracks. Julka's health continued to deteriorate, also due to recently having given birth. Julka and Nella remained together in the infirmary until the Liberation, and were saved a number of times from the gas chambers by the Slavic women doctors working there, since they hid them from the infirmary lists. "After the Liberation this doctor told to me and Julka: 'At least, I managed to take you off the list three or four times'. If I survived, it was thanks to these women doctors: they were also

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the surrounding factories, mainly textile factories. The camp opened in May 1939 and was in function until April 1945. Around 130.000 women of different nationalities were deported there, of which 40.000 were Polish and 26.000 were Jewish. Children were also deported with their mothers. Women died of hunger and exhaustion, but also of inhuman medical experiments and extermination. A provisional gas chamber was added in 1944.

About the medical experiments conducted in Ravensbruck on Polish women, see <http://individual.utoronto.ca/jarekg/Ravensbruck/> (last accessed 3/4/2012). A collection of interviews by Ravensbruck survivors can be found at the database of Lund University, Sweden : [http://www3.uu.se/ravensbruck/index\\_eng.html](http://www3.uu.se/ravensbruck/index_eng.html) (last accessed 3/4/2012).

12 Nella Baroncini (born in Bologna in 1925) was deported together with her sisters Lina (born in 1923) and Iole (1917-1945) and her mother Teresa (1893-1945). Their father, a socialist, Adelchi was also arrested and killed during the war. The whole family had been denounced by a co-worker of the father, and was found in possession of a clandestine press with a number of printing machines. All the three sisters joined the Resistance by producing underground leaflets and newspapers. Nella and Lina's accounts, in which they relate their attempt to take care of their mother and of their elder sister in the camp, and the intertwining of individual and family memories of Ravensbruck, are very moving (see Beccaria Rolfi and Bruzzone 2003).

deportees” (Beccaria Rolfi and Bruzzone 2003: 271). Nella survived, while Julka died a few days after the Liberation.

This story gives a hint of the multiple inter-subjective and political connections that were created by antifascist networks of solidarity and struggle across borders, in the midst of deportation, suffering and mass death. These stories show that transnational mobility, both forced and voluntary, was widespread during the Second World War. A combination of sources in different languages can help to retrace stories that go beyond an exclusively national historical framework, such as the life stories of Julka Desković and Vinka Kitarović. The topic of the cosmopolitanism of the antifascist generation will return throughout this book. In the following section I will retrace women’s antifascist Resistance in Italy and Yugoslavia, accounting for the foundation of women’s mass organizations during Second World War.

## **2. The foundation of the AFŽ and the UDI during the antifascist Resistance**

In this section I describe the foundation of the Antifascist Women’s Front of Yugoslavia and of the Union of Italian Women during the antifascist Resistance, showing the commonalities and differences between these two organizations. Since these organizations became important institutions for women’s activism in the postwar and Cold War period, it is worth examining their creation in the war period, and their successive developments after the Liberation. During the Second World War, the creation of women’s organizations such as the AFŽ and the UDI served to link the older generation of politicized antifascist revolutionaries with the working class and peasant women who supported the partisan struggle in the war years. Unlike in other European contexts, the antifascist struggle in Yugoslavia and in Northern Italy was a truly popular phenomenon, which garnered the support of the local population. This popular support has often been overemphasized in both countries in the postwar era for reasons of political legitimacy (Sassoon 2003; Rutar 2007-2008). Nonetheless, thousands of people in different regions of Italy and Yugoslavia were involved in the struggle, constituting the basis of the Italian and Yugoslav communist parties’ popularity in the postwar period. While I use the territorial units of “Italy” and “Yugoslavia” for the sake of comparison, it is important to keep in mind the complexity of the regional, cultural and ethnic identities in the territories at stake, the dynamic character of antifascist organizing during the war, and the different “many Resistances” (Di Gianantonio 2004) which were fought in different parts of Northern Italy and across the Yugoslav territory. Also, it is important to keep in mind that the civil war and foreign occupation of Yugoslavia was much more violent and more disruptive for civilian populations than in Italy (Lagrou 2003; Judt 2005).<sup>13</sup>

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13 While population losses in Yugoslavia have been estimated above one million inhabitants out of a total population of 16 million, in Italy population losses were significantly lower, approximately around 440.000 out of 43 million inhabitants (130.000 civilians and 310.000 military). See next chapter.

### 2.1. Women's resistance in Yugoslavia: the Antifascist Women's Front (AFŽ)

In this sub-section I will describe women's participation in the Yugoslav national liberation struggle, and in particular the foundation of the Antifascist Women's Front (AFŽ)<sup>14</sup>, the Yugoslav women's mass organization whose work continued in the post-war period. The contribution of women to the Yugoslav liberation war was unprecedented in Europe: official statistics of the socialist period report 100.000 women fighting as partisans, and two million participating in various ways to the support of the National Liberation Movement.<sup>15</sup> It has been calculated that approximately 25.000 women died in battle, 40.000 were wounded, and 2000 of them acquired the officer's rank (Jancar-Webster 1990: 46). However, very few acquired the highest position in the military hierarchy. Only 92 women were designated as national heroes (Jancar-Webster 1990: 64). They were by no mean a homogeneous group; they represented all nationalities, ages and classes, and joined the movement for very different reasons, contributing in very different ways (Jancar-Webster 1990: 74).

The fact that the Yugoslav communist party had promised to constitute a Federation in which all nationalities would have an equal place, made it possible to embrace the struggle as patriotic one, especially for inhabitants of countries such as Macedonia, or ethnic minorities whose right to self-determination has never been considered before. The persecuted Jewish minority also joined the Resistance in great numbers (Loker 1977), and so did the Orthodox population persecuted by the Ustasha regime in the independent state of Croatia. Other subjective reasons mentioned by former partisan women are: a desire for social justice and the horror of Nazi-fascism and local dictatorship, personal losses and dramatic events due to the civil war, a new sense of companionship and belonging, as well as the Party's program of radical political, social and economic change (Jancar-Webster 1990: 69-71); many women joined the liberation movement in order to survive, in a context of total war and constant insecurity (Wiesinger 2009).

In keeping with the division between occupied and progressively liberated territories, women would perform a variety of tasks, particularly as fighters and nurses in the army, but also as couriers, cooks and typists. Nevertheless, according to Jancar-Webster (1990), being a fighter in the mountains was a status preferred to the risky underground activities of couriers in the occupied territories. Women of all ages also played a very important role away from the front, working in agriculture, bringing supplies to the troops, taking care of the wounded and the orphans, especially within

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14 This chapter is mainly based on the work of two authors, U.S. feminist historian Barbara Jancar-Webster, who published a volume on women and revolution in Yugoslavia in 1990, and late Lydia Sklevicky, a Zagreb-based feminist anthropologist, whose studies on women's emancipation and the AFŽ were published in the 1990s. I am also relying on Batinić's recent PhD dissertation (2009) on gender and partizanke during Second World War. A study of female partisans based on oral history interviews has also been recently published in German (Wiesinger 2008); while I am unable to read German, in this chapter I will refer to an article in Serbo-Croatian, which summarizes the findings of the book (Wiesinger 2009).

15 The source of information is the Military Historical Institute in Belgrade.

the framework of organizations such as the Communist Youth Organization (SKOJ), local or provincial National Liberation Councils (NOO) or local sections of the Party, as well as within the Antifascist Women's Front (AFŽ).

The Antifascist Women's Front, or the AFŽ, was founded in an attempt to mobilise large masses of women in the struggle against the occupation and in support of the Liberation Front. Since the majority of the population lived at the time in rural areas, the organisation strived to gain consensus among peasant women (Batinić 2009). The Yugoslav communist party emitted a directive in November 1942, following an earlier directive issued in the Croatian section one year before, establishing the creation of the AFŽ sections in all cities and villages, then to be centralised into district, provincial and regional levels. This directive explicitly stated that the organization was meant to be part of the National Liberation Movement, and that its basic goal was to provide clothing, shoes, and food supplies to the army (Jancar-Webster 1990: 123-125). The organization was hierarchical and "each of its levels was represented by its own council, the lower ones (village, city) having a broader base consisting of ordinary members, whereas the higher ones (county, region), were composed of delegates, all of them united by the republic's council and consequently by the federal council" (Sklevicky 1989b: 99).

Women who had already had experience of legal and illegal communist activities in the inter-war period constituted the core of the AFŽ federal leadership. A fundamental distinction separated a small core of urban female leaders in the republic and federal councils, who had an education and had started illegal political activities in the interwar period, from the mass of peasant fighters and nurses, 70 per cent of whom were estimated to be younger than 20 years of age (Jancar-Webster 1990: 48). A part from young partisans, the local AFŽ membership was composed mainly of older villagers, often mothers and widows who had lost part of their families in the war. Despite this major difference, AFŽ leaders managed to find a language suitable to the daily concerns of peasant women, and to mobilise their traditional skills in service of the struggle.<sup>16</sup> The support of the female population in the villages became crucial for Partisans' victory (Batinić 2009).

The first generation of AFŽ leaders – who were also simultaneously party members – included many outstanding women from all over Yugoslavia, generally highly educated and from families that had a tradition of leftist engagement. They took part in illegal revolutionary activities in the 1930s, in the Kingdom of Yugoslavia, after the banning of the communist party in 1929. They often joined legal women and youth organizations in the pre-war period, using these organisations to spread socialist and antifascist ideals.<sup>17</sup> This generation included Lidija Šentjurc (1911-2000), Vida Tomšić

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16 "It is a testament to the communists' exceptional wartime astuteness that they found a way to put peasant women's traditional labor skills to use in a systematic and organized fashion. In the Party's institutional practice, much like in its rhetoric, the traditional and the revolutionary coexisted. Rather than confronting village ways, Party women tried to adapt and direct them toward the Partisan cause. AFŽ activists frequented traditional village gatherings and joined women's conversations about their daily concerns" (Batinić 2009: 139).

17 In 1923 the Alliance of Feminist Societies in the State of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes (Al-

(1913-1998) and Olga Vrabčić from Slovenia, Bosa Cvetić (1914-1972), Spasenija Cana Babović (1907-1977), Mitra Mitrović (1912-2001), Milka Minić and Judita Alargić in Serbia and Vojvodina, Anka Berus (1903 – 1981), Olga Zerdig Kovačić, Vanda Novosel, Marija Šoljan and Kata Pejnović (1899-1966) in Croatia.

Kata Pejnović, the first AFŽ president, was an exception among urban, relatively young, highly educated leaders, since she was an older, self-taught peasant from the poor rural area of Lika. Her husband and her three sons, who had fought in the Resistance, had been killed in the war; after these losses she started to wear a black headscarf, which she never abandoned (De Haan, Daskalova and Loutfi 2006). She became an icon of sacrificial motherhood during the Resistance (Batinić 2009). She wasn't the only one who paid a high personal price for her antifascist choice. Many AFŽ leaders had spent long periods in jail or concentration camps, had been tortured, or had suffered terrible personal losses during the war. Latinka Perović<sup>18</sup>, KDAŽ president in the 1960s, relates that she initially had some generational conflicts with older KDAŽ women who had been part of the Resistance. After some time, she discovered about one of the older women she had troubles with, Milka Lasić, lawyer and pre-war Communist, that her husband had been killed in Jasenovac concentration camp, and that her child had been disappeared by the Ustasha regime (Milošavljević 2008). Other female partisans had had to leave their children behind (Batinić 2009). Vida Tomšić had spent a considerable time in Italian jails during the war, while her antifascist husband had been sentenced to death.

The first national conference of the AFŽ took place in Bosanski Petrovac on the 6th of December 1942, and was attended by 166 delegates from all over Yugoslavia. In November 1943, in Croatia alone 243.000 women were reportedly members of the AFŽ, and by the end of the war two million women had officially joined the organization (Jancar-Webster 1990: 143-44). In fact, women's participation in the AFŽ was uneven and largely depended on the situation in the different regions. Women's coun-

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*iancija Feminističkih Društava u Državi S.H.S.*) was formed. The Alliance was affiliated with the International Alliance for Women's Right to Vote. Its neutral position allowed it to exist even when, after the coup d'état of 1929, trade unions and other political associations, as well as the communist party, were banned. In the 1930s therefore, many young communist women successfully managed to 'infiltrate' legal women's organizations and youth associations. The youth section of the Women's Alliance was led by future KPJ leaders such as Mitra Mitrović, and published the journal *Žena Danas*. Large mobilizations for the suffrage and strikes against the high cost of living were organised by the Alliance in the late 1930s, while between 1939 and 1941 peace marches and mass demonstrations for peace took place in all main towns (Jancar-Webster 1990: 35).

18 Latinka Perović (born 1933 in Kragujevac) is a Serbian historian and former politician. She graduated in philosophy and obtained a doctorate in political sciences. She was president of the Conference for the Social Activity of Women from 1961 until 1964. She was secretary of the League of Communists of Serbia between 1968 and 1972, but was dismissed from politics since her views were considered too liberal. Since the mid-1970s she has been engaged in historical research, and in the post-1989 period she has been engaged in public initiatives for the democratisation of Serbian society. A volume was published recently, containing interviews and essays on her life and work (see Milošavljević 2008).



cils and commissions were formed from previous cores of underground resistance, but only Croatia saw the emergence of an organised and autonomous structure (see Sklevicky 1989b; 1996). In the rest of the Yugoslav territory, these structures emerged unevenly between 1942 and 1945, corresponding with the liberated zones and with the degree of implantation of the partisan movement: “Where the organization was most active and effective was among Serbian women in the war-torn parts of Bosnia and Croatia and among nationalist Slovenian and Croatian women on the Dalmatian littoral” (Jancar-Webster 1990: 157).

Mobilisations and activities – even if directed by the Party – initially occurred spontaneously; strict central supervision was difficult due to the uneven distribution of liberated and occupied areas (Jancar-Webster 1990: 136-37). Not only did the AFŽ local councils provide the army with supplies, money and medicine, but they also ran hospitals, orphanages, schools, nursing and first-aid courses, and a great number of alphabetization courses for illiterate women. The AFŽ war-period journals<sup>19</sup> incited women to contribute to the national struggle, promoted solidarity among nationalities and exalted women’s sacrifices in the war. These journals promised a better future, but without providing details about the future political system or the Soviet political system. They presented Tito as a national hero rather than a Communist (Jancar-Webster 1990: 115-117). In the immediate postwar years, the AFŽ had the task of integrating women within the Popular Front, and of consolidating the revolutionary changes in society: “the explicit stress was on teaching women of all social strata to accept these changes” (Sklevicky 1989b: 98). In the following chapters, activities of the AFŽ in the postwar period will be investigated.

## 2.2. Women’s resistance in Italy: the Groups for the Defense of Women (GDD) and the Union of Italian Women (UDI)

In this sub-section I will describe the historical process of women’s participation of in the Italian Resistance, from the creation of the Groups for the Defence of Women until the foundation of the Union of Italian Women<sup>20</sup>, the women’s mass organization

19 According to Gordana Stojaković (2011: 29-30), around thirty journals addressing women’s issues were published in the different regions of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia from 1942-1944. In the period after 1945, the following journals were published in the different republics: *Žena Danas*, Woman Today (AFŽ Yugoslavia, Belgrade, from 1943 till 1981); *Glas Žena Srbije*, The Voice of Women, Serbia (AFŽ Serbia, Belgrade, 1945-1946); *Žena u Borbi*, Woman in the Struggle (AFŽ Croatia, 1946-1953); *Napredna Žena and Makedonka*, Progressive Woman and the Macedonian (AFŽ Macedonia, with parts in Turkish and Albanian); *Nasa Žena*, Our Woman, (AFŽ Slovenia, Ljubljana 1949-1977; *Radnica*, The Female Worker (Trade unions of Yugoslavia and AFŽ, 1948-1950); *Nasa Žena*, Our Woman (AFŽ Montenegro, 1947-1978); *Nova Žena*, The New Woman, (AFŽ Bosnia-Herzegovina, 1944-1971). The AFŽ in Vojvodina published three journals in the early 1950s, *Glas Žena* in Serbo-Croatian and two others in Romanian and Hungarian.

20 As mentioned in Chapter 1, the literature on this topic is extensive, as this issue is at the center of attention of Italian historians, particularly feminist oral historians. Here I will mainly make use of Jane Slaughter’s monograph on the Italian Resistance (1997), as well as on Franca

whose work in the postwar period I analyse. The Italian Antifascist Resistance was, as mentioned earlier, limited to the Nazi-fascist occupied Northern and Central regions of Italy; the Allies had landed in the Sicily in July 1943 and from there slowly advanced northwards. Without having the same widespread character as in Yugoslavia, women still participated in the struggle in Northern Italy to a significant degree. According to ANPI (National Association of Italian Partisans) sources, women's participation in the Resistance in Italy can be measured as follows: 35.000 women were enrolled in the partisan brigades; 20.000 were "patriots" with auxiliary functions; in total 70.000 women were organized by the Groups for the Defense of Women.<sup>21</sup>

In the testimonies of women who had participated in the Resistance, Fascism is described as an experience of constant violence, intimidation and social injustice. The inferior social status of women was part of this violence, since Fascism promoted an idea of women as exploitable workforce and as vessels for the reproduction of the nation (Pieroni Bortolotti 1978a: 57). The sexist imagery of Fascism, moreover, was coupled with racist and anti-Semitic imagery.<sup>22</sup> The lack of political freedom coincided with the lack of individual freedom. Working class women and peasant women were at the core of the popular protest against Fascism since the beginning of the war. Factory strikes and "agitations" for food distribution started in Emilia in 1940. After Italy's capitulation in 1943, demands for better working conditions and against exploitation were starting to be coupled with political demands. The Nazi occupation of Northern Italy eliminated the hope to get out of the war quickly, and increased popular discontent. On the 8th of September 1943, when the armistice with the Allies was made public, and when Nazi troops started to occupy Northern and Central Italy, women found themselves in the position to "defend" and hide former prisoners and deportees as well as Italian soldiers from the disbanded Royal Army. Partisan guerrilla attacks and Nazi retaliations escalated during the spring and summer of 1944, when inhabitants of entire villages were massacred for having allegedly supported the Partisans. The popular opposition became linked to survival, to escaping massacres and forced deportation to Germany.

The "Groups for the defense of Woman and for the assistance to Freedom Fighters" (*Gruppi di difesa della Donna e per l'assistenza ai Combattenti della Libertà*) were

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Pieroni Bortolotti's (1978a) study of women in the Resistance in the region of Emilia-Romagna, which quotes from an large number of questionnaires filled in by antifascist women themselves. I will also consider Maria Casalini's recent work (2005), which looks at the continuities and discontinuities of gender models not only between Second World War and Cold War, but also between the Fascist period and the Republic after 1945.

21 According to these same ANPI sources, 683 women were shot or died during fighting, 1750 were injured, 4633 were arrested, tortured, and condemned by fascist courts; 1890 were deported to Germany, 512 were awarded the status of war commissaries, while 16 received golden medals for their partisan activities.

22 In 1944 the prefect of Modena allowed women who alleged having been raped by a "non-Aryan" citizen to have an abortion: this amounted to an invitation to denounce the Jews who hadn't yet been deported, and to displace attention from the sexual violence of German troops against local women (Pieroni Bortolotti 1978a: 136-138). The Nazis and Fascists also accused the CNL government in 1945 of allowing "negroes to marry Italian women" (Pieroni Bortolotti 1978a: 19).

created in Milan in November 1943, on the initiative of the Communist Party, but grouping women already active in other areas. They later merged (together with some women from the Liberal, Socialist, Christian-democrat and Action party) into the Groups of the Defense of Woman (GDD). In the autumn of 1944, they were recognized as an independent organization by the CLNAI, the Liberation Committee coordinating the Resistance in Northern Italy. The goal of the GDD was to organize the Resistance to Nazi-fascism everywhere and with every possible means, and “to mobilize and unite women of all social classes, of all faiths and political opinions” (Pieroni Bortolotti 1978a: 79). The Northern GDD also established connections with Resisting forces in Rome (Rodano 2010: 20).

Some of the women involved in the antifascist Resistance in Northern Italy and Rome had been revolutionary militants from an early age, and participated in the foundation of the Italian Communist Party in 1921. Under Fascism they were frequently persecuted and arrested, but they continued to organize revolutionary communist activities, often from exile in France or the Soviet Union. Some took part in the Spanish Civil War. This older generation included personalities such as Camilla Ravera (1899-1988), Teresa Noce (1900-1980), Adele Bei Ciufoli (1904 -1974), Rita Montagnana (1895-1979) and Maria Maddalena Rossi (1906-1995). Since the beginning of the war, antifascist militants, both communists and those from other political currents, attempted to channel the already existing discontent among the popular classes.

On the one hand, the Italian communist party steered the vanguard of older women who had an experience of antifascism since the 1920s and the 1930s towards the feminine “masses”. On the other hand, many women who had suffered extreme social injustices as workers and peasants, political repression as antifascists, and personal losses as wives and mothers, found a way to express their discontent through the GDD. As Slaughter (1997: 35) reminds us, “the various courts of the Fascist government had sentenced more than 300 women to prison or confinement between 1926 and 1943.”<sup>23</sup> Against this background, Pieroni Bortolotti argues, “the GDD had a first, decisive, liberating function. While women who had already been communists were led to be involved in the GDD, an increasing number of female antifascists from the working classes started to perceive the party who organized *their* meetings, speaking of *their* emancipation, as *their* party” (Pieroni Bortolotti 1978a: 79). As Casalini notes, while the functionaries of women’s organizations generally felt that they had followed the line of the party, the militants from the base saw the birth of women’s organizations as a “spontaneous process, which combine[d] gender solidarity, humanitarian efforts and a utopian component” (Casalini 2005: 85).

Many women born in the 1920s joined the Resistance. According to Jane Slaughter’s sample of 936 partisan women, in 1943 27.4 per cent of the sample was 19 or younger, with 42.4 per cent between 20 and 29, and 15.4 per cent between 30 and 39. Family connections – antifascist parents or husbands – were important mobilizing

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23 The *confino* (confinement) was a repressive method adopted by Fascist authorities against political opponents. It consisted in segregating them in remote, poor villages, thus exiling them from public life.

forces in joining the Resistance, but so were daily struggles for survival and personal rebellions against everyday injustice. Catholic student groups and even Fascist associations among university students increasingly became cores of illegal activity. Slaughter (1997: 49-50) concludes that there was “no single motive for women’s participation in the Resistance”; the rebellion of the youth was largely spontaneous and had a limited connection to political parties: “[a]s women joined the Resistance, they no doubt had a vague sense of who the enemy was and what they hoped to change, but their goals can best be described as practical and immediate rather than strategic and long-term.” Political parties and organizations tried to channel these energies, and new communist female leaders emerged from this younger generation, among them Nadia Spano (1916-2006), Nilde Iotti (1920-1999), Angiola Minella Molinari (1920-1988), Carmen Zanti (1926-1979), Maria Michetti (1922-2007), Luciana Viviani (1917-2012), Marisa Rodano (born 1920), Baldina di Vittorio Berti (born 1920) and Teresa Mattei (born 1921).

From the spring of 1944 women became more active not only as *staffette* (couriers) but also as fighters. As Jane Slaughter (1997: 51) summarizes, “Women were visible in all areas of resistance activity, especially as staffette (couriers) and partisans with both the Brigades and smaller assault groups (the GAP/ SAP) (...) They created and staffed medical services, recruited and organized the populace, arranged demonstrations, distributed antifascist literature, worked in the information services, or simply collaborated by supplying provisions, hiding partisans, and aiding Jews and other deportees and their families. In many cases, women had multiple functions or moved from one activity to another.” The category of “partigiana” could include activities ranging from “combat and military command (including formal rank) to serving as guides and cooking and sewing for a mountain partisan brigade” (1997: 55). Women in the GDD in occupied Northern Italy also became improvised journalists, and from 1943 they started circulating various clandestine leaflets of different political orientations. The leaflet connected to the PCI took the name of *Noi Donne* (We, women).<sup>24</sup>

In June 1944, a proper journal entitled *Noi Donne* was published in Naples (in the Allied-liberated South), under the initiative of women belonging to the communist party (Michetti, Repetto and Viviani 1998: 8). On the 12<sup>th</sup> of September 1944, in liberated Rome, women leaders from different political parties (Communist, Socialist, Christian-left)<sup>25</sup> in a temporary steering committee and launched an appeal for the

24 A journal with the same name existed since 1937, as the bulletin of Unione Donne Italiane, Italian Women’s Union, an association of Italian antifascist women based in Paris and connected to the internationalist fight of the French popular front and of the Spanish Republic. Female members of the socialist party chose instead the name *La compagna* (the comradess), for their journal, sharing the name of a socialist publication founded by Camilla Ravera in the early 1920s.

25 The steering committee included the following members: communist Rita Montagnana, promotor of the committee and Togliatti’s wife at the time, and other two historical PCI leaders, Egle Gualdi and Maria Baroncini (partner of Mauro Scoccimarro); Marisa Rodano and Luigia Cobau for the Christian left (PSC- Partito della Sinistra Cristiana, later part of the PCI); for the Socialist Party, Giuliana Nenni, Pietro Nenni’s daughter, and Maria Romita, wife of Giuseppe

creation of a unitary association of women, the Union of Italian Women, with the idea to unify antifascist women of different political backgrounds, as well as antifascist women in Northern and Southern Italy. Women from the Christian-Democratic party were invited but refused to join, and in March 1945 created the Italian Feminine Center or CIF (Centro Italiano Femminile), a federation of female Catholic associations. I shall comment upon the unitary, broader political character of the UDI in the following chapters, and point to how it was connected to the strategy of “progressive democracy” designed by PCI leader Togliatti.

The UDI’s immediate organizational goals were to establish contacts with the National Liberation Committee (CNL), to promote a press campaign inviting women to join the association, and the publication of a special issue of the journal *Noi Donne*. The long term goals included: women’s right to vote at the administrative and political level, the addressing of urgent issues of displaced people, war prisoners, children in need and trade union demands and the constitution of provincial and local committees. The basic unit of the association was the local Circolo, whose seat had to be autonomous and separate from the ones of political parties; all the provincial sections were linked to a provincial committee, and all the provincial committees were subservient to the National Committee located in Rome (Michetti, Repetto and Viviani 1998: 266-7). Women from all political and religious backgrounds were invited to join, with the exception of “the elements compromised by Fascism (who had public tasks), or known as immoral, or able to disaggregate the association (dishonesty, arrogance)” (Michetti, Repetto and Viviani 1998: 267).

In this second section I have provided an historical background of women’s anti-fascist Resistance in Yugoslavia and Italy. In the next section I will proceed to discuss the historiographical interpretation of women’s participation in the Second World War from a gendered perspective.

### **3. Assessing the impact of women’s participation in the Resistance**

After having described the main historical characters of women’s participation in the Resistance in Yugoslavia and Italy, I would like to reflect, in this section, on the impact of this participation on gender relations, comparing historical debates in Italy and the former Yugoslavia. As mentioned in the previous chapter, it is only with the emergence of second wave feminist groups and movements that the history of women’s participation in the antifascist Resistance started to be investigated in depth, through both archival research and oral history. Women’s mass participation in the antifascist Resistance has remained until today, in fact, a crucial reference point for women’s and feminist movements in Italy and the post-Yugoslav successor states. Women’s entry into politics during the antifascist Resistance is generally identified with a break in the traditional gender order, a break that is generally perceived as only temporary, and as

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Romita; for the Action Party, Bastianina Musu, mother of Resistance fighter and staffetta Mari-sa Musu; for the Liberal Party, Josette de Menasce Lupinacci and for the Labour Democracy (Democrazia del Lavoro), Emilia Siracusa Cabrini (Rodano 2010: 24-25).

having quickly been put to an end by the Cold War backlash.

My comparison of the Italian and the Yugoslav contexts will focus on three main issues which have occupied historians of the Resistance: 1) the subversive image of female fighters; 2) the re-signification of traditional female roles, notably motherhood, during and after the war and 3) women's everyday experiences and their personal antifascist choices beyond gendered discourses and symbols. The relationship between gendered representations and real women as political subjects, as well as the continuities and discontinuities in gender regimes are at the core of these debates. In the last part of this section I will argue that a focus on women's political agency, rather than on gendered representations, can open up new insights in women's political history, and can highlight how former partisan women, after the radical experience of the antifascist Resistance, continued to pursue their political engagement in the postwar and Cold War period.

### 3.1. Images of female fighters in Yugoslavia and Italy

According to feminist historians in Italy and in the former Yugoslavia, women's access to armed struggle during World War Two was perceived as temporary and extraordinary (Batinić 2009: 84), and was generally framed in the masculine gender. When women prove that they are able to fight and to assume high political tasks, they are seen – and see themselves – in a different light, in terms of bravery and worthiness, qualities that imply the assumption of a symbolic male gender. This phenomenon has been defined as one of *substitution* of gender roles (Sklevicky 1996; Casalini 2005). There are a number of examples in which female political leaders define themselves or are defined as comrades or fighters in the male gender.<sup>26</sup> According to Casalini, this signals the persistence of the stereotype according to which “women who adopted attitudes and demonstrated abilities that are typically associated with masculine identity lose their own sexual connotation in other people's eyes” (Casalini 2005: 73).

Sklevicky make similar remarks in relation to women fighters in the Balkans. In this region at the crossroad between the Austro-Hungarian and the Ottoman Empire a number of feudal traditions of gender change existed, for instance the phenomenon of sworn virgins in Montenegrin and Albanian mountains (Young 2000), or the tradition of women taking up weapons to substitute the father, brother or husband in war (Sklevicky 1996: 38). In both cases, women do not access emancipation as women, but assume a masculine identity through the implementation of male clothing and male tasks, since femininity cannot be identified with decision-making and violence.

Women's historians note that this new temporary order in fact coexisted with the previous gender order: many reserves towards women's participation in the struggle, and many concerns about their moral and symbolical status as fighters persisted

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26 For instance when the brother of Anna Cinnani, partisan from Piemonte, told her: “Remember, you are not a woman, but a communist (*un comunista*, m.), and you are fighting in the Resistance” (Pavone 2006: 544).

(Batinić 2009; Slaughter 1997; Bravo and Bruzzone 2000). Archival documents relate a variety of episodes when “moral panic” arose in relation to the presence of women within Partisan detachments. The embarrassment towards women fighters was also due to the constant presence of enemy propaganda. Nazi-fascist and collaborationist publications portrayed female partisans in particular as promiscuous beings, gone to the woods because of the promise of “free love”. Italian nationalist publications in Trieste, for instance, used sexualized racist imagery as a way to de-legitimize the Slavic Partisans (Nemec 2000; Ballinger 2003). This imagery becomes even more negative when the subversion of gender roles is accompanied by a subversion of class and race hierarchies, as in the case of Yugoslav partisan struggle in Istria (Sluga 1994, 2001). Historian Gloria Nemec (2000) has singled out a racist and sexist caricature of the Slavic female partisan, or *drugarica*, published in the Italian nationalist newspaper *Il Grido dell'Istria*.<sup>27</sup> Italian nationalist descriptions of “slavo-communists” generally suggest “a propensity to militarism, collectivism, and violence, as well as primitivism” (Mihelj 2009: 8).<sup>28</sup> Something similar happened in Slovenian and Croatian anti-communist publications, which used a sexualized language to denounce the activities of the communist Partisans (Kranjc 2006; Jambresic-Kirin and Senjkovic 2010).<sup>29</sup>

In order to counter enemy propaganda, but also because of shared conceptions about proper male and female roles, women were often relegated to less valued – although not less dangerous – tasks behind the front lines, to provide assistance and support to male fighters (Batinić 2009). This attention towards the moral image of the Resistance, for instance, caused many Italian Liberation Committees (CNLS) to exclude women from the Liberation parades in Italy, or let them parade only with banners identifying them as nurses. Sometimes, even partisan women themselves seemed to share the negative moral values attached to the female presence in partisan units. A woman fighter declined to be part of the parade on Liberation Day, and admitted

27 The clandestine newspaper *Il Grido dell'Istria* (Istria's cry) portrayed the Yugoslav female partisan – la drugarizza – (*drugarica* in Slavic means female comrade) with a caricature and the following comment: “A delicate flower of progressive femininity. She knows 57 ways to torture a person, she can kill a man especially if Italian in 15 ways, all “made in Yugoslavia”; she is lending herself to the needs of free love even with no need of chocolate and she can give birth while standing on her feet; she uses soap scarcely, once a year, on occasion of the Marshal's birthday; she has a particular love for someone's else property; she can cry for six hours “Živio and Smrt” [Life and Death]. Here's the woman that all true progressives wish to have as wife, sister or mother.” (9 of December 1945). The caricature can found at: <http://www.unioneistriani.it/grido/popup.html> (last accessed 3/4/2012).

28 Moreover, the Yugoslav male partisan is depicted within early Cold War caricatures (see illustrations in Ballinger 2003) as grinning, dark skinned, and sexually threatening towards Italian women; this shows the difficulty in drawing a line between racism against colonial subjects and racism against Slavic minorities at home or in the neighbouring Balkans, particularly during Italy's imperial conquest of the region.

29 “As the war advanced, the Ustasha official organs published frequent messages about ‘two worlds – two women’, one being the ‘world of the woman-mother’, the other the ‘world of the woman-beast’, who, obsessed with the ‘theories of free love and emancipation’, was deemed to have become ‘public chattel’” (Jambresic-Kirin and Senjkovic 2010: 77).

that the male comrades “were right” about not letting women march together with men, since the watching crowd immediately singled out the few women present as “prostitutes” (Casalini 2005: 75).

Despite similar taboos and concerns in relation to women’s presence in the army, the positive representation of female fighters is with no doubt stronger in the Yugoslav context than in the Italian one, and is probably a consequence of the stronger relevance of the Resistance as a foundation myth for the new socialist regime. The images published in the journal *Women in Struggle* (*Žena u borbi*) during the war years express these new values: photographs show women that work, study, attend demonstrations, talk in public and also women with a weapon in one hand and a child in the other, strong and independent (Sklevicky 1996: 31-32; see also Wiesinger 2009). Portraits of beautiful female partisans are frequently published in propaganda brochures about the new Yugoslav Federation in 1945 and 1946, as the highest point on the scale of women’s emancipation. Other images include veiled women and female peasants working, learning to read, and voting for the first time.

In the Italian left-wing press, however, apart from a few heroic representations within the war years publication *Noi Donne*, women’s participation as partisans isn’t explicitly glorified. The female partisan is an exception that challenges the mainstream moral. In the press, women are generally described not as partisans but as supporters and collaborators, or as the weeping mothers, spouses and sisters of dead freedom fighters (Casalini 2005). The “choice” to take part in the struggle is described most often as a male one, while women are allegedly “forced” by the war to act in extraordinary ways. Very few photos of women with weapons exist, and sometimes, like in a picture of female partisans of the Montefiorino republic, are explicitly farcical.<sup>30</sup> Because in Italy the continuities with the previous social order were greater, and because communists searched for compromises with other political forces, the subversion of gender roles during the conflict was made far less visible. It is no coincidence that the only woman in arms in the Italian communist press in the liberation period was a Soviet Partisan (Casalini 2005: 76). In the next section I will pursue this discussion of the re-signification of gender relations in the postwar period and describe how women’s gendered roles were framed in war and postwar discourses in Yugoslavia and Italy.

### 3.2. Motherhood, “women” and femininity as consensual signifiers

In the previous section I have addressed the issue of women’s armed participation in the war, a phenomenon entailing a temporary disruption of gender roles. According to many feminist historians, however, as the Liberation approaches, women are once

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30 In this picture three women are posing for the camera as partisans under the gaze of a man who is mockingly pointing a weapon at them. Two women clumsily hold rifles, contrasting with the very feminine dress of one of them. The one in the center holds a *mattarello* (traditional cooking tool) covered by a *sfoglia*, a layer of fresh pasta (2006: 72). The picture can be seen at [http://download.kataweb.it/mediaweb/image/brand\\_espressonline/2009/09/10/1252573818928\\_3-donnepartigiane.jpg](http://download.kataweb.it/mediaweb/image/brand_espressonline/2009/09/10/1252573818928_3-donnepartigiane.jpg) (last accessed 1.5.2012)



again assigned traditional gender roles and tasks. When the war ends, the priority shifts towards national reconstruction and towards the legitimacy of the new political governing forces. The institution of the family is gradually re-naturalized as the basis for social, economical and moral reconstruction. Both in Italy and in Yugoslavia, post-'45 political regimes have to limit the disruptive potential of civil war, and the threatening potential of class divides in a context of great poverty and social inequalities. The category of "women" and the traditional female values of motherhood and care can be gradually re-signified in the direction of political unity and reconstruction.

In the Yugoslav context, women are invited to join the liberation struggle not only as citizens but more frequently also as mothers: women's "affective potential" can well serve the struggle for national liberation. Next to the extraordinary figure of the female combatant stands the figure of the heroic mother: Batinić (2009) convincingly shows how traditional figures of sacrificial mothers from Balkan epics and folklore, such as the Jugovic mother or the Kosovo Maiden<sup>31</sup>, are mobilized in the partisan press when describing the experiences of young partisans or the pain of peasant women who have lost their loved ones in the war. The affective potential of motherhood is exemplified in a speech given by Jela Bićanić at the first conference of the AFŽ in Croatia. She states that women, as mothers, are able to pass on the hatred of fascism to their children and to other children; moreover, they can ease the disruptive effects of civil war in the new socialist society, spreading reconciliation among the different nationalities and social strata.<sup>32</sup> Traditional functions of motherhood can mobilize a number of emotions that are functional to the establishment of brotherhood and unity. Women, through motherhood and social reproduction, can symbolize the rebuilding of national unity and the future social reconstruction.

A similar discourse can be found in a speech by Ferruccio Parri<sup>33</sup> at the UDI's first congress in October 1945. After stating that women should not repeat "the same things that we men do, often so badly" in the political, social, economic, and intellectual field, Parri argues: "[t]his sensitivity of yours must be directed towards the problems of education and assistance, the problems of motherhood, which are yours, the problems of modern assistance, of ancient charity but understood in a new way, with a different orientation, as a social duty. This duty cannot be fulfilled with bureaucratic coldness, as is usual for men, but can be fulfilled well if animated by a feeling, by that feeling that you can offer better than we can (...)." <sup>34</sup> Women's honor and women's

31 For a discussion of the Kosovo myth from a gendered perspective, see Slapšak (2000b).

32 "Women! Raise children who love their neighbors and country, and eradicate hatred from your hearts. Let's make hatred disappear between Serbs and Croats, city dwellers and villagers, because we all contributed equally to this struggle." Quoted by Sklevicky (1996: 43).

33 Ferruccio Parri (1890 – 1981), Partisan and leader of the Action Party, was Italy's Prime Minister in the second half of 1945, the first after the proclamation of the Republic.

34 "Questa vostra sensibilità va indirizzata verso i problemi dell'educazione e dell'assistenza, i problemi della maternità, che sono vostri, i problemi dell'assistenza moderna, della carità antica ma intesa con diverso concetto, intesa con diverso orientamento, intesa come un dovere sociale, il quale dovere non può essere risolto con freddezza burocratica com'è uso dei maschi, ma può essere ben risolta se animata da un sentimento, da quel sentimento che voi sapete portare meg-

bodies, therefore, are strictly connected to national honor and national borders, and become a metaphor of the progress and of the morals of the nation that has to be reconstructed. Against the enemies' allegations of communists wanting to dissolve the family, the *KPJ* and the *PCI* instead reinforce the idea of the family as a potential basis for moral and national reconstruction.

Lydia Sklevicky (1996) has noted the contemporary presence of old and new values within the *AFŽ*, while Bravo and Bruzzone (2000: 225) have addressed the promotion of motherly virtues by the Italian left in 1945. Within the *AFŽ* and the *UDI* there is a new formulation of social models and social relations, and yet a persisting ambivalence towards traditional culture. The traditional gendered division of labor and the separation between male and female, public and private, is not displaced but rather pragmatically reincorporated in the new political context. According to Sklevicky (1996: 56), what takes place is a "process of reinterpretation" through the merging of new and old values, so that the "new values modify the cultural meaning of the old forms". Traditional feminine values such as piety, endurance, honor and dignity are readapted in the new political direction, and become part of the representation of the ideal "new woman", creating a continuum of values that coexist with social and political change. Bravo and Bruzzone (2000: 223-228) note that the symbolism of motherhood can mean that gender roles are once more naturalized; at the same time, women can adopt a discourse of motherhood to vindicate their power in society and politics. In the next chapter, I will show how antifascist women's organizations reinterpreted a traditional value such as 'motherhood' in a new way in the Cold War period.

Against an interpretation that would define the shift from gendered images of heroic female fighters to images of mothers as necessarily conservative, and the transition from the war to the postwar period as a necessary return to the traditional gender order, it is important, in my view, to keep in mind the fundamental ambivalence in the symbolic function of gendered discourses and practices, and female bodies. In Yugoslavia, the picture of the "new woman" embodies symbolically the "poetics of the future" from which the revolution draws its imaginary potential. In Italy, this utopian potential is more easily contained, but nevertheless the signifier of the women's participation in the political arena can stand as symbol of progressive values and democratization.<sup>35</sup>

At the same time, while emancipatory values have a "revolutionary and mobilizing effect", traditional values represent a base of stability for the social order (Sklevicky 1996). Women's interests (as spouses and mothers, workers and housewives) can appear to transcend political, religious, and class divisions, and thus can signify

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lio di noi. (...) Per noi (democratici) nel vincolo familiare c'è qualcosa di fondamentale per il progresso civile, per il miglioramento civile che prima di tutto è un miglioramento morale." Archivio Centrale *UDI* Roma, fondo cronologico, 1 congresso *UDI* – sabato 20-martedì 23 ottobre 1945, B7 fascicolo 66.

35 This is exemplified by Togliatti's famous 1945 statement: "Democracy needs women, women need democracy" (*La democrazia ha bisogno della donna, la donna ha bisogno della democrazia*, litt. Democracy needs the Woman, the Woman needs democracy).

unity, compromise and reconciliation.<sup>36</sup> As the *KPJ* and the *PCI* needed to compromise between revolutionary discourses and the reconstruction of the social order, the discourse on woman's position in society oscillated between emancipatory and traditional during the war years and in the immediate postwar period.

In concluding this section, we may note that the dialectic between revolutionary moments and return to order affects the symbolical representations of women and gender relations in broader society (Sklevicky 1996; Jambresic-Kirin 2009; Bravo and Bruzzone 2000). "Women", as symbolic signifiers, do not only represent the border of the national group (Yuval-Davis 1997), but also the borders of the shifting social order, between tradition and modernity, conservation and change.

However, while these ambivalences in gendered relations and representations are important in order to understand the transition from the war to the postwar period, gendered representations do not encompass the whole range of individual and collective experiences lived by women during the Resistance, nor their great sense of pride and entitlement which resulted from their participation in the struggle. In the next section I will discuss some scholarly contributions that explicitly emphasize women's agency during the Resistance.

### 3.3. Beyond representation: women's agency in feminist historiography

Women were not just victims or martyrs; their own positive identification with female roles, their own perception of how these roles should be fulfilled, and their own notions of rights due them as females pushed them to act. Traditional roles did not dissolve but rather expanded, assumed new value, or became politicized. Women were not simply defending what was, but what they thought should be, the female experience.  
(Slaughter 1997: 4)

In the preceding sections I have compared women's and feminist historical analyses of two particularly powerful figures of the Italian and Yugoslav Resistance: the figure of the female fighter and the figure of the mother. In this section I'd like to move beyond gendered representations and discourses and reflect upon studies that have discussed women's agency during the Resistance. As Slaughter emphasizes in the above quotation, we should be careful not to reduce women to heroic martyrs or passive victims. It is important, instead, to give space to individual and collective experiences of women's political agency during the Resistance, beyond more or less conservative gendered representations that prevailed in the postwar period. The choice to join the Resistance was determined, according to Di Gianantonio (2004: 12),

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<sup>36</sup> In the case of the *UDI*, the undetermined category of "women" is ideally suited to serve the *PCI*'s political strategy of democratic compromise and the consensus among antifascist forces. Among *UDI* leaders, complex negotiations took place in order to assure equal representation of women from different parties within the *UDI* (Rodano 2010: 43-44).

by an intertwining (*intreccio*) of subjective and geopolitical and historical factors, “between political and cultural tradition and personal choice, between oppositional behaviors entrenched in collective memory and necessary adaptations to the changing conditions of the liberation war, between crystallized habits and breaks provoked by the war” (2004: 12).

As mentioned in the previous chapter, women’s and feminist historians in Italy and Yugoslavia tend to construct the Second World War as a temporary disruption of the old gender order, and the postwar period as a moment of conservative backlash. For many antifascist women, however, the participation in the antifascist Resistance represented a radical break, which changed their life path in the postwar period. There are hints that even traditional female practices and tasks as care takers assumed a totally different significance in the context of the liberation struggle. As Jancar-Webster writes, reporting an observation of the partisan leader Mitra Mitrović:

...for the first time in their lives peasant women were shown open appreciation for the performance of their routine tasks. Knitting, weaving, baking, planting, and milling became valuable for a purpose larger than the family. Women felt a new respect and a new appreciation for themselves. They eagerly opened their homes to the partisans and to orphans. Women also performed local government duties in the absence of a permanent government structure, taking over tasks formerly performed only by men. This service gained public recognition for the women and gave them a new sense of self-esteem (Jancar-Webster 1990: 142).

This sense of respect and self-esteem was directly connected to the experience of political decision-making within the Resistance. Franca Pieroni Bortolotti (1978a: 72) draws similar conclusions when pointing to the “change of direction” of traditional female values in the liberated areas:

Women restore the meaning of institutions for the people, in the liberated areas. Yes, the meaning of institutions, but institutions that are different from the traditional ones, and in a way that is quite different from the traditional way, even if they often start from the real conditions, those offered by tradition. For instance, women try to reorganize first of all the health system, the distribution of food, the clinics, and the survival of children, old people and those who are ill. In a word, they try to provide for the immediate needs of a community. This is the only principle, when in ’44 no one yet discusses women’s suffrage, no one even asks if women will be consulted about the future of the country, for instance on the choice between republic and monarchy.

Thus even before having gained the right to vote, many women felt that their contribution during the Resistance was fundamental to the success of the liberation movement, and to the survival of local communities and of their most vulnerable inhabitants (the children, the elderly and those who were ill or injured). Gender roles, as evidenced by these analyses, are therefore invested both with traditional and with

revolutionary meanings, even when women's new political agency expresses itself through old "feminine" activities.

For women engaged in the partisan struggle, femininity often represents a strategic tool that can be deployed in the political and armed Resistance. As Slaughter (1997: 63) recalls, gender stereotypes are often used in a strategic way, as in other experiences of guerrilla war, and the sex-segregation of 1940s patriarchal societies becomes "a resource that women used and leaders relied upon in their struggle." Fascists and Nazis, in fact, "were probably more inclined to view women as wives, mothers, or potential companions rather than as political enemies. This is not to ignore the violence and brutality with which women were treated if they were suspected and discovered. Nevertheless, age-old sexual assumptions gave women a "cover" men did not have."

Because of this possibility to strategically rely on gendered stereotypes, women could carry clandestine publications, weapons and bombs on their persons. They could also rely on traditional feminine networks, building support for the struggle in the community (Slaughter 1997: 70). In her interview, Vinka Kitarović recalled a number of episodes in which she carried dynamite and weapons while working as *staffetta* in the region of Bologna. Often, she and her fellow female comrades encountered a German patrol, and managed not to be discovered by "fooling around" (*facevamo le sceme*) and by flirting with the German soldiers, since "we were not ugly" (*non eravamo brutte*). At the same time, while being able to use femininity in a strategic way, women were aware of the high risks involved in their actions: "You needed to find in yourself the courage, 'now I have to overcome the fear'. And then, when it was over, your legs were trembling."<sup>37</sup>

A number of women in Italy and Yugoslavia dared to risk their lives for the cause, and fought alongside the men; they realized that their role was fundamental to the success of the movement (Slaughter 1997; Jancar-Webster 1990). As both Batinić and Slaughter note, in the memoirs of former female combatants, the time spent in the partisan brigades is often remembered as a moment of extraordinary solidarity, fraternity, and equally shared enthusiasm between male and female fighters. Partisan women gained a sense of worthiness and entitlement that would accompany them throughout their lives. Slaughter makes an explicit comparison between the Italian Resistance and the Yugoslav Resistance on this point. She quotes Barbara Jancar's conclusion which warns that "the sense of togetherness achieved in participation in a common cause is not the same as equality" (Slaughter 1997: 53, quoted from Jancar-Webster 1990: 99). Certainly women's presence in the Resistance was not immediately conducive to women's full equality. Many women, however, fought for their own individual freedom, and continued to fight for women's full equality within women's organizations in the Cold War period. Taking part in the Resistance often represented a subjective, personal break with the previous gender order, which led to the choice to be politically active after 1945 (see Di Gianantonio 2007). For many women the entry into antifascist politics in the 1930s and 1940s represented a radical opening of new life possibilities. Teresa Noce, in her 1973 autobiography, remembers:

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37 "Avevi bisogno di trovare in te quel coraggio, 'ora devo vincere la paura'. Che poi, quand'era finito, ti tremavano le gambe." Interview with Vinka Kitarović, 6th of april 2011.

Some years ago I went to visit Vera Ciceri Invernizzi [a former partisan and leader of the GDD] in a hospital in Milan where she had a serious operation. Happy to see me, recalling our meeting a long time ago in Paris, the dear comrade said to me “Just think! If you had not recruited me I’d have stayed a housewife all my life and thought of nothing but washing floors and cooking for my husband. Thanks to you, I became a communist and had a beautiful and interesting life (quoted in Cammett 1981: 174).

Teresa Noce was deeply moved when she heard these words, since she was aware of the Fascist persecution and imprisonment that Vera and her husband had suffered. Despite high personal risks, a number of women in Italy, Yugoslavia and in the rest of Europe had engaged in antifascist activities during the interwar period and during World War Two, gaining a sense of entitlement and a passion for politics that would accompany them all their lives. As I will show in the next chapters, in the postwar and Cold War era antifascist women put their organizational skills and their personal engagement in service of left-wing political parties and women’s organizations, such as the Union of Italian Women, the Antifascist Women’s Front of Yugoslavia and the Women’s International Democratic Federation.

## Conclusion

In this chapter I have sketched an historical background for the rest of the thesis, comparing women’s participation in the antifascist Resistance in Yugoslavia and Italy. In the first section, I give a brief historical overview of antifascist Resistance in Italy and Yugoslavia during the Second World War, in order to show the entangled history of Fascism and antifascism across Italo-Yugoslav borders. As shown in this section, a number of cross-border encounters between Yugoslav and Italian antifascist militants, including women, already occurred during the war. Italian and Yugoslav antifascist militants met in jails or in concentration camps for political prisoners, such as the women’s camp Ravensbruck. After the capitulation on the 8th of September, some men and women deported to Italy from occupied Yugoslavia joined the Italian resistance, while some Italian soldiers waging war in the Balkans joined Tito’s partisans. In order to give an idea of the intensity of these transnational contacts, I recount the stories of Vinka Kitarović, a student from Croatia who became a partisan courier in the region of Bologna, and of the friendship between Nella Baroncini and Julka Desković, two young antifascist women who met as inmates of Ravensbruck concentration camp.

In the second section of the chapter, I analyze the formation of women’s antifascist organizations during World War II, looking at the parallel foundation of the Antifascist Women’s Front of Yugoslavia (*Antifašistički Front Žena Jugoslavije* – AFŽ) in 1942 and of the Groups for the Defense of Woman and for Assistance to Freedom Fighters (*Gruppi di difesa della donna e per l’assistenza ai Combattenti per la libertà* – GDD) in 1943, which were transformed in 1944-1945 into the Union of Italian Women (*Unione Donne Italiane*-UDI). I highlight different forms of women’s participation in the Re-

sistance in the Italian and Yugoslav contexts, and notably the fact that these organizations connected an avant-garde of politicized antifascist women with the peasant and working class masses who opposed war and foreign occupation. I also point out that while the Antifascist Women's Front of Yugoslavia was founded exclusively by communist militants, the Union of Italian Women gathered women from different political forces (Communist, Socialist, Christian-left, Action Party), which were part of the Italian antifascist coalition. The broader composition of the UDI will be discussed more in the further chapters, since it had an impact on the organizational dynamics and on the autonomy of the association in the Cold War period (see Chapter 6).

In the third section of this chapter, I connect scholarly debates about women in World War II Italy and Yugoslavia, showing that in both countries women's political participation in the Resistance was highly controversial and ambivalent, creating a profound and yet uneven subversion of gender roles. Gendered representations as symbolic signifiers were crucial to nation building, but also to the establishment of a new social order. Nonetheless, as I show by referring to a number of scholarly contributions, as well as to the interview with Vinka Kitarović, the individual and collective experiences of women in the Resistance were far more complex and heterogeneous than symbolic representations would suggest. I therefore argue that a focus on women's political agency, rather than on gendered representations, can open new insights in women's political history. Female partisans' political agency, in fact, did not come to an end with the Second World War, but continued in the postwar and Cold War period, when a number of these former partisans became part of the leadership of left-wing political parties and women's organizations in Italy and Yugoslavia.

In the next chapter I shall proceed to analyze the activities of Italian and Yugoslav antifascist women's organizations in the immediate postwar period, looking at the ways in which the AFŽ and the UDI engaged in national, social and political reconstruction between 1945 and 1948. In the next chapters I will demonstrate that antifascist women's political activism was not limited to the war years, but rather continued after 1945 in different forms, locally and internationally.

## Chapter 3

### The AFŽ, the UDI and the task of postwar reconstruction

#### Introduction

Even though I did not like feminine work, as I have said, I agreed to work for women with other female comrades, especially since in Milan there was an urgent problem to be solved. We were approaching winter, a winter that would be harsh, harsher maybe than the war winters that had passed.

The children in Milan, especially the smaller ones, were in danger. Weak, malnourished from the deprivations they had endured, how could they survive another winter of hunger and cold? We, communist women, what could we do for the children of Milan, for “our” children?

(Teresa Noce 1974: 365)

In the autumn of 1945 the war was over, but the task of social, economic and political reconstruction had just started. The issue of assistance to children in need was a pressing one. From 1945 until the early 1950s, UDI social activities in aid of poor children took place in many different cities. The first city to set the example was Milan, where political parties were re-organizing after the end of the war, as were the women’s organizations. Due to shortages of food and coal, the living conditions in postwar Milan were especially harsh for children. Communist leader Teresa Noce<sup>1</sup> had the idea to seek help from the communist party section of Reggio-Emilia, a “red city” in which the fertile agriculture assured a greater amount of resources. After some time, the PCI

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1 Teresa Noce (1900-1980), a working class seamstress and self-taught journalist, was among the founders of the Communist Party of Italy in 1921. First wife of communist leader Luigi Longo, in 1926 she expatriated with him to Moscow and Paris, where she contributed to the first clandestine editions of *Noi Donne*. In the 1920s and 1930s Teresa Noce undertook several clandestine trips to organize antifascist activities in Italy. In 1936 she went to Spain with the international volunteers supporting the Republic in the Spanish Civil War, and became the editor of the journal of the Italian volunteers in the International Brigades. She took part in the anti-fascist Resistance in France, and was deported in 1943 to the concentration camp Ravensbruck, and later to the forced labor camp Holleschein. After the war, she was one of the 21 women elected to the Italian Constituent Assembly, and had an important role in drafting the 1946 Constitution. After the war she became communist MP and president of FIOT, the trade union of female textile workers. In 1950, she was the proponent of the law assuring welfare rights to working mothers (see Chapter 6).



in Reggio-Emilia agreed to host two thousand children for the winter of 1945. A group of communist women<sup>2</sup>, united around Teresa Noce in a small office, started to organize the departures, and were quickly overwhelmed by the amount of requests coming from hungry, desperate children across the city.<sup>3</sup> Without any previous experience, and with the help of doctors, associations and private citizens, the communist militants managed to vaccinate children, to gather shoes and clothes, and with the help of Allied troops to obtain a train and food rations. After an epic journey lasting a whole day, the two thousand children managed to reach Reggio Emilia, where they spent the entire winter of 1945.

This chapter focuses on the immediate postwar period, notably on antifascist women's activism at the national level in Yugoslavia and Italy, from the summer of 1945 to the beginning of 1948. I thus contribute to the literature about women's political agency in postwar times, and show how great numbers of antifascist female militants in Italy and Yugoslavia continued to be active after the end of World War II, engaging in national and local reconstruction efforts as well as in the struggle for women's rights. Contrary to the common belief, the end of the war did not, in fact, imply the end of women's activism initiated during the Resistance years. It implied instead a transformation of the possible forms and structures of engagement, and the beginning of mass organizing in favor of women's rights. This chapter will focus on the local and national activities of the two major antifascist women's organizations of this period, the Union of Italian Women (UDI) and the Antifascist Women's Front of Yugoslavia (AFŽ).

In the first section of the chapter I compare women's engagement in the postwar reconstruction efforts in the two neighboring countries. I look at the two founding congresses of the UDI and the AFŽ in 1945, and at the ways in which UDI and AFŽ female leaders and delegates defined the most urgent tasks of the organizations. Both organizations identified women's equal access to the public sphere as a primary goal, promoting the right to vote, the right to be elected, and the right to take part in education and in the labor market as equal to men. At the same time, as the speeches of communist leaders Vida Tomšić and Rita Montagnana show, the Marxist idea of

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2 Luciana Viviani was also part of this group. As she recounted in our interview, in Milan she had the task to "re-organize the old feminine commissions [of the PCI]". This meant getting in touch with the older generation of women, who had been forced into exile in France or the Soviet Union during Fascism, as well as with the younger generations, those who had become activists through the experience of the partisan struggle. The communist group of Milan was thus composed both of antifascist women who had become activists in the 1920s and 1930s, and of the younger "war generation", that is, "the girls who distinguished themselves in the war actions, previously students from upper class families, leading a normal life." Interview with Luciana Viviani, 9th of April 2010.

3 "There were many hungry children. The humid and cold weather was coming and there was no coal. There were innumerable pitiful cases. There were children who slept in crates of sawdust to get warmer, without sheets or blankets, children abandoned or left with elderly relatives who did not have the strength and means to look after them. Some children were ill, so we had to exclude them from the list and try to get them in hospitals. There were filthy children, full of scabs and lice" (Noce 1974: 367).

women's *social motherhood* – modeled after the same idea in the Soviet Union – was very important in the immediate postwar period. According to this idea, women contributed to society not only in their equal engagement in the public sphere, but also in their contribution to the reproduction of society because of their ability to give birth. The state, therefore, had to recognize that motherhood constituted a social contribution, and accordingly had to provide adequate welfare measures for mothers and children.

In the second section of this chapter I examine a second aspect of the idea of “social motherhood” promoted by the UDI and the AFŽ. According to this view, women were seen as naturally more inclined to social work, assistance and reconstruction after the devastation caused by the war. The UDI and the AFŽ, therefore, engaged in assistance on a large scale, with impressive results in the fields of women's education and assistance to children. Although second wave feminists have mainly read these social activities as a continuation of women's traditional gender roles, I argue that maternalist discourses were a form of strategic essentialism (Thorn 2010). They led to a transformation of the traditional conceptions of motherhood that had existed in the interwar period, and they contrasted with other, more conservative visions of motherhood promoted by conservative forces, notably the Catholic Church.

The conception of women's emancipation put forward by the UDI and the AFŽ was clearly different from the traditional feminine model dominant in both countries; women's new roles in the polity were vested with new meanings, and connected to the new democratic politics of social justice – although in Yugoslavia the democratic process quickly ended because of the communist party's monopoly of state power. In the third section of this chapter I examine the role of female antifascist leaders in fostering women's rights in the new Italian and Yugoslav constitutions, both approved in 1946; I look in particular at how these organizations mobilized women, articulating egalitarian discourses at the political and juridical level, while stressing women's natural roles as mothers and social workers.

Finally, in the fourth section, I compare the ways in which the UDI and the AFŽ articulated their role as avant-garde, and planned ‘enlightenment’ projects for the “feminine masses”; this chapter thus also discusses how the subjectivities of the female leaders differed from the subjectivities of “rank-and-file” militants. The discussion of the relation between women's organizations and their respective communist parties is developed in detail in Chapter 5.

## **1. Women's social work of national reconstruction**

In the second half of 1945, the European continent was completely shattered by the Second World War. It is difficult to conceive of the dimensions of this catastrophe today: “It is estimated that about thirty-six and a half million Europeans died between 1939 and 1945 from war-related causes (equivalent to the total population of France at the outbreak of war)” (Judt 2005: 17-18). Italy and Yugoslavia were both countries in chaos, impoverished and devastated by the conflict. Buildings and infrastructures

were in ruins, and food was scarce. Deportees and internally displaced persons were trying to find their lost family members and to return home.<sup>4</sup> The situation was particularly serious in Yugoslavia, where nearly 10 per cent of the population had perished, and hundreds of thousands of children were orphaned by the war.<sup>5</sup> To quote Tony Judt (2005: 17) again,

[t]he true horrors of war had been experienced further east. The Nazis treated western Europeans with some respect, if only the better to exploit them, and western Europeans returned the compliment by doing relatively little to disrupt or oppose the German war effort. In eastern and southeastern Europe the occupying Germans were merciless, and not only because local partisans – in Greece, Yugoslavia and Ukraine especially – fought a relentless if hopeless battle against them.

Italy, too, was deeply affected by the conflict after 1943, because of Allied bombings, fighting on the ground and Nazi retaliations against the Resistance. Widespread poverty and food shortages continued long after the end of the war.<sup>6</sup> Children were living in critical conditions, particularly in the big Northern cities and in Naples, which had been hit repeatedly by Allied bombings.

Women's organizations such as the AFŽ and the UDI – which had already established antifascist solidarity networks during the war – engaged immediately with the social work of reconstruction. Already in 1945, immediately after the liberation, both organizations organized their first founding congresses. In order to do this they had to overcome a number of material and financial obstacles. Accounts from the time tell of incredible journeys in the midst of extreme poverty to reach the congress locations, and of enthusiastic solidarity efforts made in order to host and to feed the hundreds of women delegates.

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4 “The problem of feeding, housing, clothing and caring for Europe's battered civilians (and the millions of imprisoned soldiers of the former Axis powers) was complicated and magnified by the unique scale of the refugee crisis. This was something new in the European experience. All wars dislocate the lives of noncombatants: by destroying their land and their homes, by disrupting communications, by enlisting and killing husbands, fathers, sons. But in World War Two it was state policies rather than armed conflict that did the worst damage” (Judt 2005: 22). About postwar related trauma in Europe, see the collection edited by Withuis and Mooij (2011). About UNRRA humanitarian relief in postwar Europe, see Zahra (2011).

5 “Yugoslavia lost 25 percent of its vineyards, 50 percent of all livestock, 60 percent of the country's roads, 75 percent of all its ploughs and railway bridges, one in five of its pre-war dwellings and a third of its limited industrial wealth – along with 10 percent of its pre-war population” (Judt 2005: 17).

6 “Italians, who suffered two consecutive years of hunger in 1945 and 1946, had the lowest average food levels of all the west European populations in the spring of 1947” (Judt 2005: 86).

### 1.1. The first postwar AFŽ congress (Belgrade, June 1945)

The Yugoslav AFŽ held its first postwar congress in Belgrade in June 1945, immediately after the second congress of the Slovenian AFŽ branch in Ljubljana. Belgrade had been liberated in the autumn of 1944, well before Italy and the rest of Europe, liberated in the spring of 1945. Ordinary Italian and Slovene antifascist women from Trieste wrote some detailed travel accounts of their visit to Belgrade<sup>7</sup>, and these travel accounts give an impression of the destruction of the country in 1945. Lina Morandotti writes of the ruined landscapes on the way between Zagreb and Mostar, and of her encounters with the many Italian former soldiers who are trying to get back home. At the station of Vinkovci they meet another train full of refugees:

On our wagon full of Italo-Slovenian women from Trieste, all of a sudden two young Triestine women arrive, formerly detained in a concentration camp. They recognize the comrades; hugs, kisses, tears follow; they are sisters and they ask: "Is our mother alive? What's left of Trieste after the bombings?" They want to know everything; such happiness; such joy; their parents are alive; Trieste hasn't been destroyed; now it's their turn to tell us of those concentration camps, those tortures...they are exhausted but comforted by the thought of getting closer to the homeland.<sup>8</sup>

The country is full of devastation and sorrow, but also full of enthusiasm and optimism, because the war has ended. The local population is very welcoming towards the guests from Trieste. They share their rationed food and their homes with them, and express their gratitude towards the liberation movement. Lina Morandotti even "slept in a bed with a husband and wife since there was no other possibility." Her and the other reports contain a number of references to the amounts of food received during the travel, a sign that food scarcity was a big concern in 1945.

The 1945 AFŽ Congress starts on the 17th of June, and is attended by 960 delegates from Yugoslavia and 500 guests from women's organizations in the Allied countries, the Soviet Union and Britain, as well as antifascist women from France, Italy, Albania, Czechoslovakia and Hungary (Božinović 1996: 154). Marshal Tito himself introduces the meeting, and a minute of silence is observed to commemorate those who fell in the war. Then AFŽ leaders, foreign delegates and delegates from the different Yugoslav regions alternate on stage for three days.

In his speech, after having congratulated women for their heroism during the

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<sup>7</sup> For a reflection on the hegemony of the Yugoslav forces in Trieste, see the next chapter.

<sup>8</sup> "Sul nostro vagone composto di Trieste [Triestine] Italo-Slovene, irrompono due signorine triestine internate in campi di concentramento si riconoscono con le compagne abbracci, baci, lacrime, sono due sorelle chiedono la nostra mamma vive? Trieste che cosa è rimasto dai bombardamenti? tutto vogliono sapere quanta felicità quanta gioia i genitori sono vivi Trieste non è stata distrutta ora sono loro che raccontano quei campi di concentramento quelle torture... sono stanchissime le sostiene la felicità di avvicinarsi sempre più alla patria" (*sic*), Lina Morandotti, relazione, no date, in Ljubljana, Archiv Republike Slovenije, AS 1576, Glavni odbor Slovansko-Italijanske antifašistične ženske zveze, box 1, folder 11A.

war, Tito enumerates a series of “tasks” that await women and the whole country: “the consolidation of our popular government, the care for children and for the future young generations, the consolidation of brotherhood and unity, the reconstruction of the country.”<sup>9</sup> He particularly insists on women’s role in strengthening the popular government and the brotherhood and unity among the people, against the enemies that are still omnipresent, and against those who spread hatred among the different nationalities. He also stresses that women have the task to educate the youth in “a new spirit, the spirit of love towards our country, our Yugoslavia.”

The speech of Vida Tomšić<sup>10</sup> at the congress is also significantly centered on the issue of the protection of mothers and destitute children after the human losses of the war. Tomšić reminds her listeners that in the old Yugoslavia, motherhood for working women had not meant “happiness, but big worries”, and that infant mortality had been the highest in Europe. She promises that in the new country the laws will not merely remain on paper, but instead that the state will provide hospitals, kindergardens for working mothers and houses for war orphans.<sup>11</sup> Tomšić invites women to care for the youth as mothers, but also as social workers: “As one woman yesterday said, we fought for the happiness of our children, but even if all my children fell in war, there are still hundreds of thousands of children to whom we can offer our love.”<sup>12</sup> Tomšić urges women to do their best to solve this situation, while waiting for the reconstruction of state apparatuses. The new state in return will be engaged to provide social justice for all, helping those who are in need, so that “in Yugoslavia there will not be even one poor child”, and that “a mother will not worry when her child is born.”<sup>13</sup> In fact, she states, “[r]eal women’s emancipation cannot happen with-

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9 “Naši najvažniji zadaci su učvršćenje naše narodne vlasti, vaspitanje djece, našeg mladog narastaja, naših budućih pokolenja, učvršćenje bratsva i jedinstva, izgradnja naše zemlje” p.1., “Maršal Tito o novim zadacima žena”, I Kongres AFŽ Jugoslavije, Beograd, 19-6-1945, fond Antifašistički Front Žena Jugoslavije (1942-1953) 141-1-52. Beograd-Arhiv Jugoslavije.

10 Vida Tomšić (1913-1998, born Bernot), became an antifascist activist in the interwar period, when she was a law student at the University of Ljubljana. In 1934 she joined the Communist Party, whose Central Committee she entered in 1940. She was arrested and tortured by the occupation forces during the war, and her husband Tone Tomšić was shot. After the war she held key positions in the Slovenian and Federal government, simultaneously acting as a leader of the AFŽ. She contributed to the revision of the 1974 Constitution, promoting women’s rights, family planning, and the rights to contraception and abortion. Tomšić also advocated women’s rights in international settings, such as the United Nations. For an extensive biography of Vida Tomšić, see Jeraj (2006).

11 Tomšić stated that as a result of the occupiers’ war against civilians, there were 534.000 orphans, and 1.200.000 destitute children and youth in Yugoslavia. Vida Tomšić, “Socijalno staranje kao jedan od najvažnijih zadataka Antifašističkog Fronta Žena u obnovi zemlje”, pp. 1-10, I Kongres AFŽ Jugoslavije, Beograd, 19-6-1945, fond Antifašistički Front Žena Jugoslavije (1942-1953) 141-1-125. Beograd-Arhiv Jugoslavije.

12 “Kako je juče kazala jedna žena na našem kongresu: borile smo za sreću naše dece, ali kad bi izginula sva moja deca, još uvek ostaju stotine hiljada dece kojima ćemo pružiti svu našu ljubav.” Ibidem, p.3.

13 “Maršal Tito je u svojim razgovorima sa ženskim delegacijama mnogo puta isticao te

out practical concern for mothers and children, without those protections that will honor a woman's motherhood and help her with a sufficient number of houses for mothers and children, public canteens, social care for children, so that she can carry out her motherly functions as she always wished to do."<sup>14</sup> The concrete schema for the resolution of the women's question in Yugoslavia had already been formulated by Vida Tomšić in 1940 as follows: "political parity – protection of women's reproductive function – socialization of the education of children – education – work" (Sklevicky 1996: 51). In the next three sections, I compare AFŽ and UDI discourses about women's juridical, political and social rights.

### 1.2. The first postwar UDI Congress (Florence, October 1945)

The UDI founding congress was held in October 1945 in Florence, a few months after those of the AFŽ. The congress saw the participation of 298 female delegates from 78 provinces (out of a total 93), representing the 400.000 members of the organization. Foreign delegations were also present.<sup>15</sup> The first UDI congress emphasized the importance of the association's "unity", meaning the unity of antifascist women from different political parties (PCI, PSI, PdA, Christian Left). A number of speeches stressed how women's cooperation beyond parties and faiths had concretely materialized during the war when required to face the urgency of postwar reconstruction and assistance.<sup>16</sup>

In the face of these reconstruction tasks, the sense of loss and the urgency at the Congress was very strong, and is related as such by former UDI members in their history of the UDI:

What occupies the sensitivity of the participants is the vision, the memory of those women who had been killed and tortured, the testimony of the mothers who had seen their children killed in front of their eyes; the misery evoked by episodes such as the one of the delegate from Centuripe (Agrigento [Sicily]), who arrived at the congress barefoot and was able to wear a pair of shoes only thanks to the solidarity

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zadatke žena i mi smo mu svaki put odgovarale da u Jugoslaviji neće biti ni jednog deteta siročeta." p. 7; "Nova Jugoslavija mora postati srećna domovina majke i deteta. Majka se ne sme više bojati rođena svoga deteta." Ibidem, p.8.

14 "Istinske ravnopravnosti žena nema i ne može biti bez stvarne brige za majku i dete, bez takve zaštite koje će poštovati materinstvo žene i omogućiti joj sa dovoljnim brojem materinskih i decijih domova, javnih kuhinja, sa državnom brigom za dete, da obavlja svoje materinske funkcije onako kako to žena od davnine želi." Ibidem, p.10.

15 American, British, Czechoslovakian, Albanian and French delegations were present. The Yugoslav delegation was not accorded the necessary visas, but Slovene women from Trieste participated in the congress together with the Trieste delegation (see next chapter).

16 About women's cooperation in postwar Italy across political parties, and also between left-wing and Catholic organizations, see Pojmann (2008) and Gaiotti De Biase (1978).

of the other participants; the recurrent descriptions of children and young girls who prostitute themselves because of hunger and misery, particularly in the big cities.<sup>17</sup>

Widespread poverty, social injustices and childhood destitution were the most urgent problems. An equally urgent problem was caused by the return of war veterans. Because of widespread unemployment, male war veterans were strongly arguing against women's employment. The UDI attempted to resist the sacking of women, by organizing war veterans' committees in order to foster solidarity between women and war veterans. In her speech at the Congress, communist worker and trade unionist Maddalena Secco pointed out: "we are very sensitive to the fact that war veterans and former deportees need work, we are sensitive to this because it concerns our brothers, husbands, sons. But we say that it is unfair to say today, as we hear everywhere in Italy, that women must go home. (...) Women didn't leave their homes voluntarily, but because they had to make a living. If there have to be lay-offs, they must be made on the basis of workers' needs, and not on the basis of sex" (quoted in Michetti, Repetto and Viviani 1998: 289). This egalitarian position prefigured the UDI's struggle for female workers' equality, or "equal pay for equal work".

Another speech at the Congress, by PCI leader Rita Montagnana<sup>18</sup>, shows how a conception of women's complementary roles as spouses and mothers did not mean in any way a reproduction of previous Fascist conceptions of women as inferior beings. Montagnana states: "Men – who after long years of fascist dictatorship were used to consider the woman as an instrument of pleasure, or as a machine to fabricate children, or as a servant who works for unlimited time and without any compensation – had found, to their surprise, women alongside themselves in the struggle for freedom" (quoted in Michetti, Repetto and Viviani 1998: 279).

In other words the break with fascist values and sexual politics that had taken all men, even antifascist ones, "by surprise". Montagnana continues: "The modest and quiet women of our sections (*circoli*), have managed, without noise or exhibitionism, to do so many good things that they have convinced even the most skeptical of their abilities and their seriousness" (quoted in Michetti, Repetto and Viviani 1998: 279). She concludes: "there are thousands and thousands of women who are getting ready to fulfill more important tasks tomorrow, defying the legend that women can only take care of cooking, sewing, washing. They demonstrate that they can be good

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17 Michetti, Repetto and Viviani (1998: 16).

18 Rita Montagnana (1895-1979) was born into a Jewish, communist family of eight children in a popular neighborhood of Turin. Trained as a seamstress, she took part in the 'red Biennial' of 1919-1921, and with her brother Mario Montagnana she participated in the foundation of the Italian Communist Party in Turin in 1921. She married future PCI leader Palmiro Togliatti in 1924, migrating with him to France, Spain and the Soviet Union. She was one of the founders of the UDI in 1944 and she organized the first 8th of March celebrations in Italy. In the post-war period, Togliatti separated from Rita Montagnana and started a life long relationship with younger communist militant and UDI member Nilde Iotti (1920-1999). After 1958, Rita Montagnana abandoned public life, to care for her son Aldo, whose mental illness had deteriorated with time. For a story of the family Montagnana, between national and international engagement, see Levi and Montagnana (2000).

spouses, good wives and even good administrators of the public sphere, and that one does not exclude the other, but rather completes it" (quoted in Michetti, Repetto and Viviani 1998: 280).

Similar to that of Tomšić, Montagnana formulates a program that includes political and social roles for women, while reinstating women's gendered roles in the private sphere. As Giulietta Ascoli (1979: 118) notes, together with more "egalitarian" demands, the UDI Congress also expressed demands that were "specific" to women and to their role in the private sphere. While this formulation of women's roles may appear moderate, and while it was probably also a way of preventing possible anti-communist attacks, its statements were nonetheless quite progressive in comparison to the declarations made by Pope Pius XII at that time. The Vatican, in fact, rejected equal rights for women and the possibility for women to work outside the home, while reinstating motherhood as a natural destiny.<sup>19</sup>

The theme of women's political emancipation had already been advanced a few months earlier, in June 1945, at the National Conference of Communist Women, when PCI leader Palmiro Togliatti had spoken of the importance of women's emancipation for the advancement of Italian democracy, stressing notably the need to put an end to Italian women's cultural backwardness, and to struggle for "women's parity with men in all the aspects of political, social and economic life." He had also stressed the need for the UDI to be open to Catholic women, and urged the UDI to avoid subordinating itself to Communist Party propaganda, as some communist women did.<sup>20</sup>

As mentioned in the previous chapter, the foundation of the UDI was closely connected to the PCI strategy of "progressive democracy". The UDI had been envisioned by PCI leader Palmiro Togliatti as a democratic front that could affiliate women from different political parties within the antifascist unity government. The existence of the UDI was necessary in order to construct a "progressive" hegemony among the feminine masses, and to gain women's consensus by organizing women on the basis of their material interests (housing, food, children, social and economic rights, political education etc.). As made evident by a number of historical sources, however, the communist patronage over this organization was never absent. Interpreting the birth of this organization in 1944 as "autonomous" or "spontaneous" would be mistaken (Gaiotti de Biase 1978; Rodano 2010; see Chapter 6 and Chapter 7 for a detailed discus-

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19 Pius XII stated: "Every woman is destined to become a mother [...] The true woman can see and understand all the problems of human life only from the point of view of the family [...] Equal rights with men – leading to the abandonment of the house in which she had been a queen – has subjected the woman to the same amount and time of labor." The pope added that the woman who works outside the home is "dazed by the restless world in which she lives, dazzled by the appearance of false luxury, and becomes greedy for nefarious pleasures." Quoted in Ascoli (1979: 119).

20 "The Union of Italian Women is a different thing, it is an organization in which you must go and collaborate with all other women, of every faith and opinion, without making UDI sections into agencies of the Communist Party; you should mostly try to include the greatest possible number of working women into these sections." Arhiv Republike Slovenije, AS 1576, Glavni Odbor Slovansko-italijanske antifašistične ženske zveze, box 3.



sion of the concept of *autonomy*). As the quotation at the beginning of this chapter illustrates, moreover, a number of hard-liner PCI militants, including many notable communist women such as Teresa Noce, were highly skeptical of the idea of a woman-only “unitary” organization. They rejected the assumption that women’s emancipation could be a goal in itself, disconnected from class struggle (hence Togliatti’s warnings about the need to conceive of the organization as a broader alliance).

This does not mean that the UDI was simply a “transmission chain” of the party, nor that UDI women had no political agency of their own; the same can be said of the AFŽ. The numerous discussions about the need for women-only organizations within their respective communist parties demonstrate that they cannot be reduced to mere appendages of those parties. While a number of communist women were skeptical about a unitary women’s organization separate from the communist party, many UDI members of different political backgrounds sincerely adhered to the idea that the nation-wide issue of women’s emancipation could transcend party and class interests. As I will show in Chapter 7, from the mid-1950s the strategy of the UDI progressively shifted from party-based and class-based activism to gender-based activism, well before the great transformations which overtook the organization in the 1970s, with the emergence of second wave feminism.

### 1.3. UDI and AFŽ engagements in social work in the postwar years

The UDI and the AFŽ were immediately engaged in reconstruction work in the postwar period, both in material<sup>21</sup> and in human terms. The greatest effort went towards the assistance of destitute children and war orphans. In Yugoslavia, hundreds of thousands of children lost one or both parents in the war.<sup>22</sup> Through the AFŽ in the different localities, women immediately started to organize for the opening of houses and clinics for orphans. As former AFŽ leader Neda Božinović<sup>23</sup> relates, women collected food and money, worked in hospitals as voluntary nurses, visited the wounded and organized national canteens. As for the nursery homes, where the paid staff was mini-

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21 In Yugoslavia, a number of young women joined the youth brigades for volunteer work formed in the immediate postwar period to engage in activities of physical reconstruction. This work included the clearance of ruins in bombed cities and the construction or reconstruction of bridges and railways, such as the building of the 92 kilometers railway Brčko-Banović in Eastern Bosnia.

22 Božinović (1996) reports 280.000 orphans, while Judt (2005) estimates 300.000. During her 1945 speech Vida Tomšić stated that there were half a million orphans in Yugoslavia.

23 Neda Božinović (1917–2001) was born in Kotor, Montenegro. She graduated from the faculty of Law in Belgrade in 1939, and got actively involved in antifascist activities before and during World War II. After the war she became engaged in the AFŽ and she had several important decision-making functions until the mid-1970s. At the beginning of the Yugoslav wars in the 1990s, she engaged once again in anti-war women’s movements, and notably in the activist anti-war group “Women in Black”. She also published several articles on women’s activism, and a monograph on the women’s question in Serbia in the nineteenth and twentieth century (Božinović 1996).

mal and responsible for food and supplies, a few women took charge of the organization: “they maintained the children’s hygiene, bathed them, mended clothes for them, sewed toys, entertained them, baked sweets, organized a small library, took them to their homes on Sundays and feast days, and in other ways expressed their concern and love, showing them how a stay in a home could be pleasant or at least tolerable. They publicly criticized the abuse or negligence committed by the management of the nurseries or government authorities, and demanded that the AFŽ participate in the management of the children’s homes” (Božinović 1996: 153-154).

The AFŽ members were also engaged in opening kindergartens and summer holiday camps, as well as in providing clinics for pregnant women, mothers and children. Zaviršek (2008: 3) summarizes the activities of the AFŽ as follows: “collecting information’ about individuals and families in need and reporting the ‘situation in the field’ to higher local authorities; distributing material aid to the most needy and organizing housing for war orphans; and organizing educational seminars on hygiene, infant mortality, and child care (...)” Due to the lack of doctors and skilled personnel in Yugoslavia during and after the war, the AFŽ organized courses for women to become midwives, nurses and teachers in the rural areas and in the most isolated areas (Božinović 1996: 154). No less important, as Zaviršek (2008: 3) notes, was the construction of “a new socialist subjectivity” among women (see next sections).

The immediate postwar activities organized by the UDI were also centered on assistance to children. As noted by Marisa Rodano, former UDI leader, “a women’s association, in those times, could not disregard children. They were everywhere, and there were a lot, since, after the war, the *baby boom* had exploded (...) They sneaked into all meetings and assemblies, the women always had some of the youngest in their arms; the older ones were restless, noisy, undisciplined, during the activities they ran all over the place (...)” (Rodano 2010: 66).

The most striking action of the postwar years was the large initiative organized by the Italian Communist Party, in which thousands of poor children from Milan, Rome, Cassino and the South of Italy were transferred to the richer areas of Emilia-Romagna and Tuscany during the winter of 1945-1946. After Milan, whose case I have mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, more relocations were repeated elsewhere in Italy. Farmers and sharecroppers from the “red regions” agreed to host and feed poorer children for three months. The initiative was repeated on the eve of Christmas 1946, when 12.000 children from the poor neighborhoods of Naples were sent to the center of Italy for the winter. Despite the adverse propaganda of the Church, and despite the material difficulties of the relocation, this initiative would prove to have long-lasting effects, both for the children and for their families. As Luciana Viviani<sup>24</sup>

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24 Luciana Viviani (1917-2012) grew up in a family of the Napolitan bourgeoisie. She was the daughter of theatre actor and author Raffaele Viviani. After having obtained a degree in Literature, she engaged in the antifascist Resistance in Nazi-occupied Rome together with her former husband. In 1945 she was in charge of reorganizing the feminine commissions of the PCI in Milan, and from 1946 she was elected as communist MP for four terms. She was also among the founders of the UDI, and she contributed to rearrange the Central Archive of the UDI in the 1990s. She was also the editor of an anthology of analyses and original documents retracing the

stated in our interview, “that was a great solidarity initiative, that would open many doors to communism among Neapolitan popular classes. Seeing this initiative, being hosted in these houses for three months, they understood that the communist party said the right things, and also did them. Not only did the party say the right things, but it also did them.”<sup>25</sup>

#### 1.4. The paradigm of social motherhood after 1945

As shown by Vida Tomšić’s and Rita Montagnana’s speeches during the AFŽ and the UDI congresses, the idea of women’s social motherhood – modelled after the same idea in the Soviet Union – was very important in the postwar period.<sup>26</sup> This discourse claimed that in the Eastern people’s democracies women could have children “without worrying about them”, since the state had accorded special welfare and healthcare provisions to mothers and working mothers, and had collectivized a number of services (canteens, kindergartens, etc.) that partially liberated women from individual domestic work. This discourse proved very appealing also outside of Yugoslavia among Italian and Trieste antifascist women, and the Soviet example of socialized motherhood was used to ask for similar provisions from their respective ‘capitalist’ governments (see next chapter).

This model had been elaborated with the creation of the movement of wife-activists (*obshchestvennitsy*) in the Soviet Union in the pre-war Stalinist period. As Neary describes, in the mid-1930s “a heightened emphasis on motherhood as a civic contribution and a broadened definition of maternal responsibilities combined with pronatalism and official co-optation of the family as a potential locus for the instillation of Soviet values.” Motherhood was identified as “a Soviet woman’s right and duty” (Neary 1999: 400; see also Ilić 2001). In the interwar period, moreover, political regimes all over Europe encouraged women’s civic duties through maternalist languages; Fascist Italy and Nazi Germany, in particular, “combined state intervention with voluntarism on the part of socio-economically privileged women in an attempt

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history of the UDI (Michetti, Repetto and Viviani 1998). Since the late 1970s, Luciana Viviani took part in the feminist movement. In the last thirty years of her life she lived in Rome with her partner, feminist philosopher Rosetta Stella.

25 “Ne hai sentito parlare dei diecimila bambini napoletani che furono ospitati dalle famiglie di braccianti e di contadini delle zone centrali. Quella fu una grande iniziativa di solidarietà, che però aprì molte porte che erano chiuse al comunismo nei ceti popolari napoletani. Perché di fronte ad una iniziativa di questo genere, tre mesi ospiti in queste case, capirono che quello che diceva il partito comunista, diceva delle cose giuste, e poi le faceva anche. Non solo le diceva, ma lo faceva anche. Quindi fu un’iniziativa che rafforzò molto il partito comunista a Napoli e nel resto del Mezzogiorno.” Interview with Luciana Viviani, 9th of April 2010. 70.000 children would take the “trains of happiness” in the late 1940s and early 1950s, including the children of Southern peasants, who were struggling for land reforms in Puglia and were violently repressed by the government and the local land owners. On the politicization of assistance and social work in Italy during the Cold War, see the next chapter.

26 For a comparison between Yugoslav and Soviet discourses, see Zaviršek (2008).

to encourage reproduction and remake working-class and peasant households in the service of party and state” (Neary 1999: 401).

The paradigm of social motherhood was not limited to welfare provisions, but invested the symbolical sphere as well. The image of women as natural caretakers, peace-makers and peace-builders remained very powerful in the aftermath of the war, and was reappropriated by left-wing, internationalist and pro-Soviet anti-war women’s movements in the Cold War period elsewhere in Europe (see for instance Withuis 2000 for the Dutch case, and Ghodsee 2010). These findings resonate with recent scholarship about the Canadian and US context. In his article, Thorn (2010) speaks of maternalism as a form of “strategic essentialism” in the context of left-wing women’s organizations in 1950s and 1960s Canada.<sup>27</sup>

Second wave feminists have often interpreted the reinstatement of motherhood in the postwar period as a form of backlash and return to domesticity, and have privileged the “continuity thesis” with respect to gender relations after World War Two (Summerfield 2000; see also Sklevicky 1996 and Casalini 2005). As Summerfield (2000: 18) argues, however, “the feminist critique of the advocacy of women’s dual role, and reinterpretation of it as a double burden which underpinned women’s subordination, had the effect of obliterating the difference between the modernist and traditionalist accounts, and of treating them as a monolithic discourse supporting women’s marginalization and oppression.”

As I have tried to show, however, within left-wing Italian and Yugoslav women’s organizations, discourses about women’s complementary roles as citizens and mothers challenged the legacies of previous authoritarian regimes. These discourses were often invested with new meanings and connected to politics of social change.<sup>28</sup> In the Italian context, notably, social work became highly politicized and assumed an oppositional character towards the Christian-Democratic government in the Cold War years, so that it would be reductive to read women’s engagement in the field of assistance as a confinement of women to traditional female roles (Noce 2006; see also next chapter). In the following section I examine how women’s suffrage, as well as social and economic rights, were inscribed in the new 1946 Italian and Yugoslav constitutions, and the different ways in which provisions concerning women were drafted in the two countries.

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27 About maternalist discourses and their importance for the creation of modern welfare states, see Gordon (1990); Bock and Thane (1991); Skocpol (1992); Koven and Michel (1993).

28 This argument recalls what Karen Offen has defined as “relational feminism”, citing the example of nineteenth century France: women’s biological difference and complementary role as mothers seems not to “conflict directly with women’s self-realization and self-fulfillment as a moral and intellectual being” (1988: 145).

## 2. The 1946 Italian and Yugoslav Constitutions: formulating women's rights

### 2.1. Overcoming women's inferiority as a legacy of previous regimes

Upon examining discourses and practices surrounding the issue of women's emancipation in Italy and Yugoslavia, it is important to consider in detail the unprecedented legislative changes that concerned women after 1945. A number of citizenship rights – and notably women's right to vote – were recognized for the first time in Europe after World War II.<sup>29</sup> Even if it would be difficult to deny women the right to vote after their contribution to the war effort and to the antifascist struggle, women's political, economic and social equality was not a given, and especially in Italy it had to be fought for by female representatives in the Constituent Assembly. From the collection of debates surrounding the 'women's question' in the Constituent Assembly in Italy, it is evident that communist, socialist and Christian-Democrat female representatives had to argue multiple times against the idea of women's natural inferiority. This idea was still circulating among a number of male delegates, and was inscribed in the family code inherited from the Fascist period, the so-called *Codice Rocco*, which, as De Grazia notes, "weigh[ed] like a great albatross on the legal emancipation of women in postfascist society" (De Grazia 1992: 88).<sup>30</sup>

From the Constituent Assembly debates, moreover, it is clear that delegates belonging to the UDI often argued for the establishment of concrete welfare provisions, and directly connected the protection of women and the family to economic and social measures that could ease the misery and inequality of the lower classes. While Christian-democrat female delegates defended a traditional moral and private conception of the family against state intervention, communist and socialist women were keen to reinforce the institution of the family and of motherhood on a more equal basis, connecting family life with broader democratic social changes, even though the

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29 Other countries to extend suffrage to women between 1944 and 1948 are: France (1944); Liberia and Guatemala (1945); China, Albania, Japan, Romania, Panama, S. Salvador (1946); Bulgaria, Venezuela, Argentina and Birmania (1947); Costarica and Israel (1948) (Pieroni Bortolotti and Buttafuoco 1987: 273-275).

30 Fascist pro-natalist policies not only forbade abortion, but also made contraception propaganda part of the crimes against the "integrity and sanity of the race" (De Grazia 1992: 55); the Rocco penal code punished female adultery much more severely than male adultery, and de facto recognized the legitimacy of 'honor crime' committed by men towards their adulterous wives, sisters and daughters, since this murder would be punished with between three and seven years of imprisonment. Rape was also seen as an 'honor crime', and a rapist could get away unpunished by marrying his victim (De Grazia 1992: 90). Moreover, women were forbidden a number of professions, such as teaching history, philosophy, Latin and Italian in high schools. In 1938 a new law established that public and private offices would reduce their female workers to 10 percent of their total staff (De Grazia 1992: 166). The measures contained in the Fascist family code would start being dismantled only in the 1970s. Divorce was allowed in 1974, abortion in 1978, while the measures about adultery and "honor crime" were abolished only in 1981.

image of what a “democratic family” would look like remained very vague.<sup>31</sup>

As for the 1946 Yugoslav Constitution, the provisions dedicated to women’s equality were modeled on the 1936 Soviet Constitution, and thus reflect a more radical revolutionary stance on previous class, gender and national inequalities. The main concern of Yugoslav legislators was to come to terms with territorial and religious difference, and notably with the different family law provisions that subsisted in different regions of old Yugoslavia. From the point of view of family law, the old kingdom of Yugoslavia (1918-1941) was divided in six different juridical areas. In certain parts the Austrian civil code from 1811 was applied, in others the Serbian civil code of 1844, while in Muslim areas religious law ruled. The new legislation hence aimed to unify family law and to overcome discriminatory provisions, notably the discriminatory treatment of woman in relation to economic rights, heritage, custody of children and the birth of ‘illegitimate’ offspring.<sup>32</sup> The issue of family law and women’s equality was closely interrelated with the issue of equality among the different ethnicities/nationalities and regions that composed the new Federation. It was also connected to the issue of historical backwardness, that I will address in the next section.

## 2.2. Women’s equality as citizens and workers, women’s difference as mothers

Both in Italy and Yugoslavia, AFŽ and UDI representatives placed women’s rights in a patriotic, progressive framework of national liberation and renewal, distancing themselves from pre-war feminist movements who had advocated women’s suffrage. In both new Constitutions women’s equality is formulated as women’s right to elect and be elected, women’s right to receive equal pay for equal work, women’s right to enjoy special welfare protection as mothers, and women’s right to be equal partners within the family. In the constitutional formulations of women’s rights – as citizens, workers and mothers – the combination of social and natural needs emerges. In the Italian Constitution (1948), the equality of all citizens is confirmed in article 3: “All citizens have equal social dignity and are equal before the law, without distinction of sex, race, religion, political opinion, personal and social conditions”, while political equality appears in article 48, which states that “all citizens, male and female, who have attained their majority, are voters. The vote is personal and equal, free and secret.” In the Yugoslav Constitution (1946), the comparable article 23 states that “all citizens, regardless of sex, nationality, race, creed, level of education or place of residence, who

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31 Communist politician Nadia Spano about the polemics on the Constitution and the “defense of the family”, commented: “Defense from whom? Nobody threatens the family, we are all determined to reconstruct it, to reinforce it; but we cannot forget that the familial institute has been destroyed and weakened by a regime that has oppressed Italy for too long, fascism. (...) Today, to reinforce the institute of the family means to struggle for democracy (...) this is what Italian women expect from us, they want new bases for their family” (quoted in Morelli 2007: 78).

32 The Austrian civil code, for instance, stated that “women, the foul and the blind” could not be witness of testamentary declarations (Kovačić 1947).

are over eighteen years of age, have the right to elect and be elected to all organs of state authority.”<sup>33</sup>

It is worth noting that in the Yugoslav Constitution<sup>34</sup> the article comparable to the Italian article 3, that is article 21, does not refer to gender differences: “All citizens of the Federative People’s Republic of Yugoslavia are equal before the law and enjoy equal rights regardless of nationality, race and creed. No privileges on account of birth, position, property status or level of education are recognized. Any act granting privileges to citizens or limiting their rights on grounds of difference of nationality, race and creed, and any propagation of national, racial and religious hatred and discord are contrary to the Constitution and punishable.” It is evident here that the concern of the Yugoslav legislators lies in the so-called ‘national question’, that is the reconciliation of different nationalities in a Federative state after a violent civil war.<sup>35</sup> Unlike the Italian Constitution, which is based on a conception of sovereignty that recalls a traditional Western European mono-ethnic nation-state<sup>36</sup>, the Yugoslav Constitution, while establishing a multi-national Federation, creates a form of shared sovereignty among the different “peoples” (nations/ethnicities) that compose the country.<sup>37</sup>

Regarding women’s rights as workers, article 24 of the Yugoslav Constitution includes these rights in a more general provision of equality in all aspects of public life, stating that “[w]omen have equal rights with men in all fields of state, economic and social-political life. Women have the right to the same pay as that received by men for the same work, and as workers or employees they enjoy special protection. The state especially protects the interests of mothers and children by the establishment of maternity hospitals, children’s homes and day nurseries and by the right of mothers to a leave with pay before and after childbirth.”<sup>38</sup> The Yugoslav Constitution, as this passage

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33 The official English translation can be found here : <http://www.senato.it/istituzione/29375/articolato.htm>

34 English version from the website : [http://www.worldstatesmen.org/Yugoslavia\\_1946.txt](http://www.worldstatesmen.org/Yugoslavia_1946.txt)

35 See the model article in the 1936 USSR Constitution : “Article 123. Equality of rights of citizens of the USSR, irrespective of their nationality or race, in all spheres of economic, state, cultural, social and political life, is an indefeasible law. Any direct or indirect restriction of the rights of, or, conversely, any establishment of direct or indirect privileges for citizens on account of their race or nationality, as well as any advocacy of racial or national exclusiveness or hatred and contempt, is punishable by law.” The English translation of the Soviet constitution is available at the following link : <http://www.departments.bucknell.edu/russian/const/1936toc.html>

36 See art. 1 : “Italy is a Democratic Republic, founded on work. Sovereignty belongs to the people and is exercised by the people in the forms and within the limits of the Constitution. ”

37 See art. 1 (“The Federative People’s Republic of Yugoslavia is a federal people’s state, republican in form, a community of peoples equal in rights who, on the basis of the right to self-determination, including the right of separation, have expressed their will to live together in a federative state.”) and art. 2 (“The Federative People’s Republic of Yugoslavia is composed of the People’s Republic of Serbia, the People’s Republic of Croatia, the People’s Republic of Slovenia, the People’s Republic of Bosnia and Herzegovina, the People’s Republic of Macedonia and the People’s Republic of Montenegro.”)

38 See again the comparable article in the 1936 Soviet Constitution (art.122) “Women in the USSR are accorded equal rights with men in all spheres of economic, state, cultural, social and

shows, recognizes state duties to provide women as mothers and working mothers with welfare provisions, including hospitals, nurseries, and paid leave, on the model of the 1936 Soviet Constitution.<sup>39</sup> As for the Italian Constitution, the equality of women as workers is stated in article 37: “Working women are entitled to equal rights and, for comparable jobs, equal pay as men. Working conditions must allow women to fulfill their essential role in the family and ensure appropriate protection for the mother and child. The law establishes the minimum age for paid labor. The Republic protects the work of minors by means of special provisions and guarantees them the right to equal pay for equal work.” Despite the efforts of PCI and UDI representatives, no substantial welfare provisions are guaranteed in this article. The expression “appropriate protection” remains quite general, and the article subordinates women’s right to work to their “essential role in the family.”<sup>40</sup> Welfare provisions are, however, established for large families, mothers and children in need, in article 31: “The Republic assists the formation of the family and the fulfillment of its duties, with particular consideration for large families, through economic measures and other benefits. The Republic protects mothers, children and the young by adopting the necessary provisions.”

The central place of the traditional family, advocated by Christian-Democrats in the Constituent Assembly, is also evident from articles 29, 30 and 31. In article 29 “[t]he Republic recognizes the rights of the family as a natural society founded on marriage. Marriage is based on the moral and legal equality of the spouses within the limits laid down by law to guarantee the unity of the family.” Although the equality of the partners is recognized, this equality is limited by the need to maintain the unity of the family, which is generally seen as a hierarchical unity (Gaiotti de Biase 1978: 93). The family as a “natural society” echoes the Catholic conception of the family based on religious marriage, and the penal code inherited from Fascism contributes to enforce gender discrimination in the private sphere. Moreover, even if the protection of so-

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political life. The possibility of exercising these rights is ensured to women by granting them an equal right with men to work, payment for work, rest and leisure, social insurance and education, and by state protection of the interests of mother and child, prematernity and maternity leave with full pay, and the provision of a wide network of maternity homes, nurseries and kindergartens.” In 1936, abortion was forbidden in the USSR. This norm was repealed in 1955.

39 Yugoslavia follows the Soviet Union also in its measures towards abortion, allowed only for medical reasons since 1936, because of Stalinist pro-natalist policies. Abortion for non medical reasons will be legalised only after the break with the Soviet Union, in the early 1950s. “Yugoslavia, responding to demands from women’s organizations, decriminalized in article 140 of its 1951 Penal Code both self-induced abortion and the obtaining of an abortion that did not meet existing legal requirements. Indeed, Yugoslavia was the first people’s democracy to enact such a rule in its penal code prior to the Soviet Union’s return to a more liberal approach. In 1952 Yugoslavia adopted legislation permitting abortion for “medical and social reasons,” which were not precisely defined at that time but which clearly went beyond purely medical reasons.” (Zielinska 1993: 52-53); other Eastern European countries started to liberalize their abortion laws in the mid-1950s (Zielinska 1993). See also Chapter 7 about feminist discussions of abortion rights in Italy and Yugoslavia.

40 As Gaiotti de Biase reminds us, the adjective ‘essential’ was added after numerous debates among the different party representatives (1978: 94).



called 'illegitimate children' is a topic of heated debate, and despite PCI and UDI calls for equality, their protection is subordinated to the rights of the 'legitimate' family.<sup>41</sup> Real equality of children born out of wedlock will be fully applied only decades later, so that a number of illegitimate children would carry the infamous label "son of N.N." [lat. *nescio nomen*, unknown name] until the reform of the family code in 1975.

Because communist policy does not recognize religious marriages, the Yugoslav Constitution instead treats marriage as a civil contract, and children born out of wedlock as equal to other children, at least on paper: "Matrimony and the family are under the protection of the state. The state regulates by law the legal relations of marriage and the family. Marriage is valid only if concluded before the competent state organs. After the marriage, citizens may go through a religious wedding ceremony. All matrimonial disputes come within the competence of the people's courts. The registration of births, marriages and deaths is conducted by the state. Parents have the same obligations and duties to children born out of wedlock as to those born in wedlock. The position of children born out of wedlock is regulated by law. Minors are under the special protection of the state." Here again, the main concern of Yugoslav legislators is to accommodate territorial and religious difference, and notably the different family law provisions that existed in different regions of old Yugoslavia.

### 2.3. Women's equality as a "prize" or as a "natural outcome" of the Resistance

In the previous sections I have attempted to show that the new Italian and Yugoslav Constitutions significantly reflected women's participation in the war effort, and for the first time attempted to address women's inferior status as citizens. The utopian, revolutionary vision of antifascist movements and parties in both countries brought about a number of progressive changes in legislation, once again more radical in Yugoslavia, since communist authorities could follow the Soviet model and did not have to compromise with other forces. The Italian PCI delegates, by contrast, had to compromise with Christian-Democrat and socialist views, which were less keen to subvert the traditional patriarchal family, and were wary of the implications of state intervention in individual freedoms and family rights.

At the same time, women's rights as individual beings – or, in the contemporary formulation, women's rights as human rights – were not presented as a goal in itself, but rather were as a prize for self-sacrifice in war, "a right conquered by women in their heroic struggle for the liberation of their homeland" (Marisa Rodano, quoted by Casalini 2005: 71). In the Italian left-wing press, as noted by Gaiotti de Biase (1978: 55),

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<sup>41</sup> "Art.30: It is the duty and right of parents to support, raise and educate their children, even if born out of wedlock. In the case of incapacity of the parents, the law provides for the fulfillment of their duties. The law ensures to children born out of wedlock every form of legal and social protection, which is compatible with the rights of members of the legitimate family. The law lays down the rules and limitations for the determination of paternity."

the references to women's emancipation "either coincided with political participation or merged with the common aspiration to a society freed from misery, hunger, exploitation, unemployment." Nonetheless, many Italian women remember their first visit to the polls on the 2nd of June 1946 as a moving, thrilling event, marking the beginning of a new political consciousness and a first step towards democracy. To state that this event did not have repercussions on gender relations, therefore, as Maria Casalini does<sup>42</sup>, risks undermining women's agency as citizens and voters.

In comparison to Italian debates and publications, women's legal equality in Yugoslavia was more often presented not as a process, but as a given. In both countries, however, women allegedly didn't look for emancipation *per se*. Instead, they achieved parity in recognition of their wartime contribution. In Yugoslav documents, equality was presented as a natural outcome of the revolutionary struggle of liberation and as a natural result of the new socialist government, as in Mitra Mitrović's speech during the Bosanski Petrovac conference (1942): "We did not enter into this struggle with some pretensions for equality. There was not space for this in such moments, nor was this the most important thing, nor did women mobilize for this in such great numbers. But equality is here, quicker than could have been expected. She (*ravnopravnost*, f.) has arrived, and was gained in the only possible way, through a common struggle with the people (*narod*), for common freedom" (quoted in Sklevicky 1996: 28).

Parity or equality was often described here as an inevitable result of the revolution.<sup>43</sup> An official 1947 AFŽ brochure, for instance, stated that with the revolution "was liquidated once and for all in Yugoslavia the 'women's question', the question of equal rights for women and men, since the new Yugoslavia, truly democratic, born from the struggle, could not be anything but a State in which women are equal to men in all rights" (Kovačić 1947). The idea that the 'women's question' had been solved through legal rights will be at the center of feminist critiques in the 1970s (Sklevicky 1989a; see also Jancar 1988).

In the next section I will continue to explore the issue of women's emancipation and its connection to historical backwardness, looking at the ways in which UDI and AFŽ women dealt with "backward" conditions and customs among the "feminine masses" in the aftermath of World War II.

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42 Maria Casalini's claim is that "in Republican Italy the exercise of the right to vote seems to mark a sort of balance with women's 'right patriotism', without repercussion for the traditional structure of gender relations" (Casalini 2005: 33).

43 The foundation of women's equality was traced back to the 1941 liberation committees and to the 1943 AVNOJ declaration. Vida Tomšić repeatedly claimed in international congresses and AFŽ documents that women's right to vote had already been declared in 1941 in the liberated Partisan areas, and only ratified in 1946.

### 3. The pedagogic character of antifascist women's organizations

#### 3.1. The UDI and the AFŽ as avant-gardes: educating the feminine masses

In the aftermath of the Second World War, characterized in both countries by extensive poverty and destruction, the Italian and Yugoslav communist parties, as well as the UDI and the AFŽ, were adapting their political avant-gardism to the new context of mass politics, and were turning towards the needs of the lower classes in order to gain consensus and legitimacy among women. Particularly in rural and southern areas, but also in the peripheries of great cities, there were many women refugees and internally displaced people living in miserable conditions. The illiteracy rate was higher among women than men, even more so in less developed regions and rural areas.<sup>44</sup> Another extremely serious problem immediately after the war was infant mortality, again affecting women and children who lived in less developed areas most severely.<sup>45</sup> It was in this context of extreme class, educational and spatial inequalities – intersecting with patriarchal norms in matters of sexuality and marriage – that a number of educated antifascist women felt impelled to engage in the struggle to ameliorate the living conditions of the lower classes – and specifically women's living conditions in Italy and Yugoslavia.

After the war, the field of direct welfare intervention became a priority for women involved in the UDI and the AFŽ. From the archival sources, it is apparent that UDI and AFŽ leaders and intermediate cadres – mainly urban, educated, and thus privileged women – were appalled by the experience of direct contact with women from the lower and rural strata of society, often suffering from the hardest living conditions.<sup>46</sup> Another important underlying goal of the Italian and the Yugoslav com-

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44 If in Italy the level of illiteracy was 13,8 per cent on average in 1941, and 12,90 per cent in 1951, with women rating 15,20 per cent (as recorded in the census), in Yugoslavia the rates were much higher. Sklevicky quotes some official statistics according to which in 1931 the average illiteracy rate for the population over the age of ten was of 44,6 per cent, with men rating 32,3 per cent and women 56,4 per cent. In 1953, average male illiteracy has dropped to 14,1 per cent, while women's illiteracy was of 35,8 per cent. Enormous disparities remained between the different Yugoslav regions. In 1953, after 8 years of alphabetization campaigns, 82,5 per cent of women in Kosovo and 80,7 per cent of women in Bosnia-Herzegovina were illiterate, as opposed to 14,6 per cent of women in Slovenia (Sklevicky 1996: 105-106).

45 In Yugoslavia, the rates of infant mortality were 139 (out of 1000 births) in the years 1935-39 and 102 in 1949, with 133 in Kosmet and 79 in Slovenia in 1947 (see Sklevicky 1996: 100-101). In Italy the rate was 96 in 1939, but Central and Southern regions such as Abruzzo, Basilicata and Campania had rates that were more than double the national average. The situation improved slowly, while the gap between more and less developed regions persisted. In the years 1956-60, the average rate for Yugoslavia was 93 (while Austria: 41; Czechoslovakia: 30; Denmark: 23; Mexico: 80, see Sklevicky 1996: 101). In 1957, Italy still has one of the highest rates of infant mortality in Europe, and in the 1960s a great number of children were dying because of different infections. Italy scored better only than Yugoslavia, Portugal and Poland (See Luzzi 2004).

46 See for instance the memoirs of Marisa Rodano (2008) and Luciana Viviani (1994). About

munist parties – served by the UDI and the AFŽ – was to gain nation-wide consensus and political legitimacy among the population; this could only be realized, according to Marxist theory, if the masses acquired an historical awareness of their political conditions, and decided to organize for a better life by engaging in collective actions and organizations.

The pedagogic stance of communist parties and women's organizations, therefore, was combined with a faith in historical progress and in the possibility of individual and collective change. It relied upon the idea that the masses could be approached, mobilised and educated by left-wing forces that were able to respond to their needs. In Italy, this strategy was also needed in order to counter the influence of the Catholic Church on female voters, traditionally seen by socialists and communists as a potential pool of reactionary consensus, due to the influence of local priests. The religious influences among women were also a matter of concern for Yugoslav communists.<sup>47</sup>

According to classical Marxist theory, women's equal access to education and labour – together with the collectivization of services such as kindergartens and canteens and the socialization of motherhood – would liberate women from the slavery conditions of the private family unit.<sup>48</sup> Due to the shortage of manpower and of skilled labourers at the end of the war, Yugoslav authorities were keen to foster women's participation in the workforce, while in Italy the end of the war coincided with a strong pressure against women's labour by male war veterans who wished to be re-integrated in the labour market.

Social and economic emancipation, however, had to be accompanied by cultural emancipation and modernization. In line with modernist ideas of historical progress, both the UDI and the AFŽ were particularly engaged in the task of modernizing and "humanizing" the most backward rural areas, where traces of "feudalism" appeared in the cultural and social customs and daily lives of men and women. Religiosity and local superstitions were particularly targeted in the early postwar years in Yugoslavia, where the Muslim veil covering the whole body was forbidden in 1947 (see Chapter 6),

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the living conditions of peasant populations in pre-war Yugoslavia see Erlich (1966).

47 About the pedagogical stance of Italian and Yugoslav communist parties towards the masses and towards society, see Bellassai (2000); Bokovoy (1997); Kertzer (1996); Lilly (2001).

48 *The Origins of the Family, Private Property and the State* was published by Engels in 1884, and it has been foundational for the way in which internationalist socialist movements had envisioned women's emancipation from the end of nineteenth century onwards. Engels argued that the organisation of the family in primitive society, with matriarchy and common ownership, was radically different from its organization in industrialised society. Due to the advent of capitalism, these ancient forms had been replaced by the patriarchal family based on private property. This reversal in the "division of labour within the family" caused the devaluation of women's status. According to Engels, women could be made "the equal of man" again by "taking part in production on a large, social scale" and by reducing domestic work to an "insignificant amount of her time." This could be made possible by "modern large-scale industry", which demanded women's participation, and whose technical advances made the end private domestic labour possible by making it "a public industry."

See Engels, *The Origins of the Family, Private Property and the State*, Chapter 1x, online edition: <http://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1884/origin-family/index.htm>

while in Italy the focus of the UDI was on exploitative labour relations and miserable living conditions in the countryside.

In an official AFŽ brochure, we read: “The female peasants, before this war, used to live in ignorance, like slaves, similar to the herds of sheep they looked after” (Kovačić 1947). Within the AFŽ, a clear difference was established between the “enlightened” women, who were part of the higher, national and republican decisional organs, and also of the National Front, and the “not so enlightened” women (Sklevicky 1996: 120) whose work was limited to the local sections. A strong emphasis was placed on the need to “activate” women, through education, training and political involvement. Leader Anka Berus stated for instance: “extending the work on the political enlightenment (*prosvjećivanje*) of women, the AFŽ will help broad masses to learn to think politically, and will include them in a real resolution of all general and national problems...” (quoted in Sklevicky 1996: 117).

Since 1941, an enormous effort of alphabetization was made by the AFŽ towards women, with slogans such as “Death to illiteracy – culture is a weapon against the enemy” (*Smrt nepismenosti – prosvjeta je oružje protiv neprijatelja*) (quoted in Sklevicky 1996: 30). Courses were also given on political education, on the liberation struggle, on the newly founded governing structures (AVNOJ, ZAVNOH), and on the achievements of the USSR. In order to “activate” women, a number of AFŽ leaders were sent to newly created sections in rural areas and villages. Sometimes they had to compromise with local customs, for instance before the 1943 Bosanski Petrovac conference, when Marija Novosel was charged with taking two Muslim women to the conference, and managed to take Asnija Pajić only after having guaranteed to her husband that she would travel with her, return with her, and make her sleep in a Muslim household during her stay (Sklevicky 1996: 45).

Similar images of darkness and enlightenment were used in a report written for the UDI National Council in 1946 by delegate Orabona from Bari. After stating that the UDI in Southern Italy had only 15,000 members, she went on to say that in many factories 40 per cent of adult women were illiterate and signed with a cross. She continued: “these women did not understand anything at all: they only asked for something to eat and didn’t want to know anything else. Seeing these humiliating conditions, we said to ourselves that our first initiative should consist in bringing a bit of light and to form them as only a luckless creature can be formed.”<sup>49</sup> Then she detailed efforts to establish alphabetization classes in Bari. The difference between rural areas and towns, South and North, were described in terms of a dichotomy between enlightenment and progress and darkness and backwardness. UDI activists attempted to bridge these regional gaps. In her report, Orabona also mentioned the solidarity efforts by UDI women in Milan, who sent clothes to the UDI section in Bari: “I have seen some women crying. Knowing that [other people in] Milan thought of them has been extremely beneficial. In those rural centers, were they feel cut off as if they were

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49 “Queste donne non capivano niente di niente : chiedevano solo da mangiare e non volevano sapere nulla. Date le condizioni umilianti ci siamo dette che la prima iniziativa doveva essere quella di portare un po’ di luce e di formarle come si forma una creatura che non ha il minimo di fortuna.” UDI, Consiglio Nazionale, 13-14 gennaio 1946. Archivio Centrale UDI, Roma.

*Zulus*<sup>50</sup>, they start to understand that they are entering the frame of Italian life and when they approach us they say, ‘really, Milan took an interest in us.’<sup>51</sup>

### 3.2. “Wearing trousers”: UDI and AFŽ leaders rejecting “work among women”

Antifascist women in Italy and Yugoslavia, and particularly communist women, shared a great faith in the possibility of change through solidarity and through direct economic and social intervention; they also shared a great faith in political interventions on the social reality, resulting in a complex interaction between grassroots needs and top-down solutions. The situation on the ground was very difficult, and often the masses of working and peasant women resisted the changes that were proposed – sometimes enforced – by women’s organizations. Also, the personal assumption of political responsibility and the adherence to the strict codes of revolutionary militancy was a long and painstaking process among rank-and-file members: UDI and AFŽ leaders in their national meetings frequently complained about the “weaknesses” on the ground and pointed out the large amount of political labour required from committed militants, because of the lack of qualified intermediate “cadres” that could relay national decisions to and implement them in the different provinces.<sup>52</sup>

A number of ambivalences thus existed in the discourses formulated by AFŽ and UDI leaders when speaking about the “feminine masses”. These ambivalences can be explained by looking at their different speaking positions, and by taking into account class, cultural and political differences among women. Casalini (2005: 82) suggests that the contradictory image of the female militant found in left-wing publications – emphasizing women’s heroism and democratic spirit on the one hand, while denouncing women’s deep ignorance and lack of interest in politics on the other – can be explained by the gap between the traditional image of Italian women, and the image that some of the militants have of themselves. As mentioned in Chapter 1, female communist leaders’ personal emancipation and self-realization depended upon their entry in male-dominated parties, and upon their adhering to rigid class-based and party-based ethics. Among communist parties’ male members, “work among women” was often seen as secondary and instrumental, and as less valuable than “universal” party work.

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50 This term, mutated from the name of the African tribe, is still popularly used in Italian to indicate savagery and lack of education.

51 “Ho visto delle donne che piangevano. Il fatto di leggere sul giornale che Milano aveva pensato a loro è stata una cosa quanto mai benefica, perché in quei centri rurali, dove si sentono tagliati fuori come se fossero addirittura degli zùlù, cominciano a capire che entrano nel quadro della vita italiana e quando ci vengono vicino dicono veramente Milano si è interessata di noi.” UDI, Consiglio Nazionale, 13-14 gennaio 1946. Archivio Centrale UDI, Roma.

52 On the issue of the formation of communist cadres and on the notion of communist self-critique, see Bellassai (2000) for Italy and Sklevicky (1996) for Yugoslavia.

Many AFŽ and UDI leaders, therefore, would agree to work with the “feminine masses” in compliance with party discipline, but always half-heartedly. This is evident for instance in a 1946 speech by Togliatti, addressed to the communist women of the UDI. Togliatti complained that when asked to get involved with political tasks within the UDI, some communist women

...[r]eject the invitation by saying that it is not worthy to do work among women, since women do not understand anything, or because the work among them is a real chore, or boring or something. This resistance can be found also among very valiant female comrades, who, however, once they have acquired certain experiences and capacities of party work, seem to have *ideologically worn trousers*, and do not wish to work with women any longer (Togliatti, quoted in Casalini 2005: 83, emphasis added).

Here we witness again a phenomenon of *substitution* (see Chapter 2), and the idea that the access to “universal” party work and party functions can elevate a number of women beyond the usual concerns of the feminine masses. Indeed, for many female militants, women’s equal value had to be proved through militant activism within the party, and not through specific women’s organizations. This was specifically the case for the older generation of Italian women, who clandestinely struggled against Fascism, such as Teresa Noce, whom I have quoted at the beginning of this chapter, and whose position is exemplary of the older communist generation. But younger women, too, identified more as communists than as women: their relation towards the “feminine masses” was necessarily a complex one.

Sklevicky remarks on a similar situation within the AFŽ. The AFŽ leaders were often struggling to be taken seriously by their male counterparts in the communist party, and were often regarded with contempt for dedicating themselves to work among women. As a result, some activists “[did] not like to work with women”, since this work is surrounded by “a sense of inferiority” despite constitutionally guaranteed equality (Sklevicky 1996: 121; see also Zaviršek 2008). Sklevicky (1996: 121) quotes a report by the AFŽ secretary of the Vinkovac district, in which she argues that the function of the organization is to familiarize less politicized women with activism. The women who are already politicized should engage directly in the National Liberation Front. When this doesn’t happen, women “are forced to listen to the same thing twice”, one time in the AFŽ meetings and the other in National Front meetings. In time, the most active and most politicized women are converting to other tasks, abandoning the despised “feminine work”. Sklevicky (1996: 121) ironically comments: “women’s vertical mobility through the AFŽ has already started to take its toll!” The discussion of the differences and similarities between “universal” party-work and “feminine work” is crucial, and will eventually lead to the dissolution of the AFŽ in 1953. This debate about the need for separate women’s organizations will be considered further in Chapter 6.

The hierarchical difference between the leaders of the antifascist women’s organizations, and the women who constituted the rank-and-file base of these organizations, is an intrinsic part of postwar and Cold War women’s mass activism. I explore and discuss this issue throughout the book, also in relation to the production and

interpretation of sources mainly written by the few leaders of these organizations (see in particular Chapter 1). As I argue in the following chapters, when looking at how UDI and AFŽ leaders acted and spoke as political representatives of “Italian women” and “Yugoslav women” in their international encounters, the top-down, pedagogic character of postwar women’s organizations emerges even more explicitly.

## Conclusion

This chapter dealt with the national activities of Italian and Yugoslav women’s antifascist organizations in the immediate postwar period, and with the definitions of women’s rights and women’s roles formulated by these organizations. In the first section I described how, in the midst of widespread poverty and destruction, the UDI and the AFŽ managed to organize their first congresses in 1945, in two countries devastated by the Second World War. I have also shown how these organizations immediately engaged in the reconstruction effort, with impressive results in the fields of women’s education and assistance to destitute youth and communities. Contrary to common belief, women’s political activism in the two countries continued well beyond the Second World War through antifascist internationalist women’s organizations such as the UDI and the AFŽ. The historical examples cited in this chapter demonstrate the first thesis of my research, namely the fact that women were active participants in political and social struggles after the end of World War II. In the previous sections I discussed the idea of *social motherhood* taken from the Soviet regime, and the maternalist language of female activists, which constituted a powerful form of strategic essentialism, which allowed them to argue for welfare provisions as well as for women’s inclusion in the polity on the basis of their supposedly different “nature”. In the next chapter I will show how the idea of “social motherhood” circulated across borders, from the Soviet Union to Yugoslavia to Italy via Trieste, through the physical and imaginary links established by women’s internationalism in the postwar period.

Demands for social motherhood and welfare provisions were accompanied by demands for legal, economic and social equality in the public sphere, notably women’s right to vote and be elected and women’s right to fully access education and the labour market. In the third section of this chapter I analyzed how the Italian and Yugoslav Constitutions, both approved in 1946, formulated women’s rights as citizens, workers and mothers, marking an important discontinuity with the pre-war period. This proves that women’s antifascist organizations in Italy and Yugoslavia were crucial in promoting women’s rights, and in raising women’s awareness about the possibility to exercise these rights.

While showing the impressive results of women’s postwar activism, I have also attempted to show the limits of these earlier Marxist formulations, which did not conceive of women’s individual rights and emancipation as a goal in itself. Rather, women’s equal rights were seen as an inevitable outcome of socialist revolution in Yugoslavia or as a necessary result of the democratization process in Italy. As I will relate in Chapter 6, however, this initial faith in the modernizing power of laws and in



state intervention was put into question by the persistence of discrimination against women despite formal legal equality. In this chapter I have also highlighted the limits of top-down decision-making, and described the important differences between an avant-garde of women leaders and the “feminine masses”, which remains a constant element of women’s antifascist organizations in the early Cold War period. In the next chapters, I shall explore more in depth the position of UDI and AFŽ leaders and their role in formulating a national and international agenda for women’s organizing.

## Chapter 4

### Women's internationalism after 1945

#### Introduction

In that September of 1947, in which we arrived at the work camp to build the first modern railway that would connect Samac to Sarajevo (...), the image of [Josip] Broz Tito was everywhere. He was the first communist leader who conquered me; about Palmiro Togliatti in fact I knew far less, also because his life seemed less adventurous and he looked like a professor, while Tito was very handsome, with his military beret and a red star over it (...) The evenings in Zenica were wonderful. There I discovered almost everything that constituted the basis of my cognitive heritage. An avalanche of information fills the gap in which I had been living during the war. The world appears all of a sudden immense, and my street, via Vallisteri in Parioli, microscopic.  
(Luciana Castellina 2011: 231-238)

In her recent memoir based on her 1943-1947 youth diaries, Luciana Castellina<sup>1</sup> tells the story of her journey across Eastern Europe in 1947. The young Italian militant travelled with a communist youth delegation to Prague for the World Youth Festival in July 1947. After having celebrated her 18th birthday with comrades of different nationalities in the "Titova college" of Prague, a student house renamed after Yugoslav President Tito, Castellina decided to take a train with two male English comrades to join a volunteers' work brigade in Zenica, Bosnia, to build the Samac-Sarajevo railway. Young people of all nationalities surrounded Castellina in her long train journey and in the work camp in Yugoslavia. In Zenica, the young militant even received a diploma of *udarnica*, i.e. shock worker<sup>2</sup>, which she treasured all her life.

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1 Luciana Castellina (born 1929), is a politician, journalist and writer. She was part of the Italian Communist Party from 1947 until 1969, when she became one of the founders of the dissident newspaper *Il Manifesto*. This group was expelled from the PCI. From 1974 till 1984 she was a member of the far left Partito di Unità Proletaria per il Comunismo, which became part of the PCI in 1984. She was elected as European MP in 1979, 1984, 1989 and 1994.

2 The term *udarnik* (shock worker) is a Soviet term indicating a super productive worker. The term was widely used from 1929 onwards within the framework of the Five Year Plan. Workers were encouraged to display productivity through competition in the factories, earning thus the ti-

The transnational meetings in Zenica were an encounter with the world for a young woman who had grown in an upper class half-Jewish family, in Trieste and in the exclusive Roman neighborhood of Parioli, where she used to play tennis with Mussolini's daughter, her schoolmate.

The international fascination with the newly founded socialist Yugoslavia in the immediate postwar period<sup>3</sup>, and the transnational connections established between Italian, Yugoslav and Italo-Slovene women's organizations in Trieste between the end of 1945 and the summer of 1948 will be the subject of this chapter. The period between the end of 1945 and summer 1948 is characterized by the geopolitical setting that emerged as a result of World War Two, and at the same time is marked by the beginning of the Cold War confrontation between the Eastern and the Western blocs. Italy and Yugoslavia are situated in the midst of this confrontation: the Italo-Yugoslav border becomes, at least until 1948, the line dividing the West from the East, while the contest over the city of Trieste involves not only Italy and Yugoslavia, but also the Anglo-Americans and the Soviet Union, and their redefinition of spheres of influence in Europe.

Already in 1945, it was evident that the geopolitical situation in Italy was very different from that of Yugoslavia, and that the destiny of left-wing forces was deeply tied to their respective geopolitical positions within the new East/West spheres of influence. While the Yugoslav Communist Party managed to liberate the country with very limited external support, and to seize power with little opposition from the Allies, the Italian Communist Party belonged to an antifascist national unity government, and had to take into account the large-scale presence of Anglo-American troops on Italian soil, which made any revolutionary effort too risky, even potentially leading to civil war, as it had in Greece.<sup>4</sup>

The situation was particularly complicated in the border area between Italy and Yugoslavia, affected as it was by old and new national and ideological divisions. This area, and particularly the city of Trieste, which had been under Fascist occupation, was liberated in May 1945 by the Yugoslav Army, and from June 1945 placed under the Allied Military Government (AMG).<sup>5</sup> The territories of Istria and Dalmatia, annexed by Italy in 1919, were liberated from Nazi-fascist occupation by the Yugoslav Army, and definitively assigned to socialist Yugoslavia by the Paris Peace Treaty of 1947. Between 200,000 and 350,000 ethnic Italians – as well as Slovenes and Croats – left Istria for fear of reprisals by Yugoslav partisans, in what came to be known in

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tle of shock workers. The term was also used in the Soviet satellites and in Yugoslavia after 1945.

3 The international support for the Yugoslav partisan struggle already began during World War Two. For instance, some antifascist Swiss doctors chose to join the partisans brigades in Yugoslavia, as related in the 2006 documentary by Daniel Künzi, *Missions chez Tito. Les missions de la centrale sanitaire suisse en Yougoslavie 1944-48*.

4 See Terzuolo (1985).

5 In 1947, under the Italian-Yugoslav peace treaty, the Free Territory of Trieste (TLT) was established. The AMG took over the administration of zone A of the TLT, including the city of Trieste, while zone B was under Yugoslav military administration. In 1954 the border between zone A and B became the border between Italy and Yugoslavia. See Novak (1970).

Italy as the Istrian exodus.<sup>6</sup> The pro-Italian and conservative press opposed the Slavic rule of formerly Italian territories, emphasised the cruelty of Partisan retaliations and strove to portray Trieste as 'a bulwark of democracy and of Western civilisation' in the Mediterranean.<sup>7</sup>

Conversely, working-class Slovenes, Croats and Italians welcomed the Yugoslavs as liberators, and favoured the idea of Trieste becoming the 'seventh' Yugoslav Socialist Republic, in line with the Yugoslav government's claim over the city. Pro-Yugoslav associations spoke of Italo-Yugoslav brotherhood and emphasised the joint effort of all antifascists in the area. Fascinated by the neighbouring socialist republic, a number of Italian workers and former partisans – particularly those living near Italy's Eastern border, in the region of Friuli – decided to emigrate to Yugoslavia in the years 1946–1947, in search of job opportunities and a better life.<sup>8</sup>

The leadership of the Italian Communist Party, however, resented postwar Yugoslav hegemony over the Triestine leftist movement, as well as Yugoslav leaders' plan to annex Trieste. Other points of disagreement were the presence of Italian war prisoners still detained in Yugoslavia, and the protection the Italian government and Allied troops had offered to Italian Fascist and local collaborators who had committed war crimes during the occupation of the Balkans. The internationalist engagements of the Yugoslav and Italian communist parties, therefore, were at odds with respective national interests, and with the attempt of each communist party to legitimate itself not only in internationalist but also in patriotic terms.<sup>9</sup>

The bilateral and multilateral encounters between Italian and Yugoslav women in the postwar period must be placed within this complex historical and geopolitical framework, of antifascist solidarity and internationalism, but also of potential national and ethnic conflicts related to the Julian Region, due to the historical legacies of Fascism and the Second World War. The dynamics of women's transnational encounters are also largely dependent on the shifting relationship between the Italian and the Yugoslav communist parties between 1945 and 1948. In this chapter I address the transnational encounters that took place between UDI and AFŽ members in the aftermath of the war, notably in years from the Liberation of Italy and Yugoslavia in 1945, until the Cominform Resolution of June 1948.<sup>10</sup>

These encounters were not only bilateral, but also situated within the multilateral setting of the Women's International Democratic Federation (WIDF), an antifascist, internationalist and transnational organization founded in Paris in December 1945, with which the UDI and the AFŽ had, as founding members, been affiliated from the

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<sup>6</sup> See Ballinger (2003: 2).

<sup>7</sup> Stuparich, quoted in Mihelj (2009: 281).

<sup>8</sup> Their stories have been recently collected in the form of an audio-documentary. The documentary is composed of oral history interviews with peasants and workers from the city of Monfalcone and the region of Friuli. See Giuseppini (2008).

<sup>9</sup> See Terzuolo (1985).

<sup>10</sup> The Cominform Resolution implied the expulsion of Yugoslavia from the Eastern block, and the expulsion of AFŽ from Women's International Democratic Federation (WIDF). I will return to this episode in detail in the next chapter.

beginning. The Women's International Democratic Federation is a very significant international platform for antifascist women from different countries in these postwar years, and gender and women's historians are only starting to assess its importance. By looking at the activities of the Italian and Yugoslav members of the WIDF, I wish to contribute to the ongoing scholarly debates about the WIDF, and about its long-standing erasure from women's and feminist history (De Haan 2010a; Weigand 2001; Ghodsee 2010). In the first section of this chapter I discuss some of the postwar activities of the WIDF in the years 1945-1947, in order to give an overview of the main goals and activities of this organization in the postwar period.

In the second section of the chapter I examine the importance of the international sphere for the UDI and the AFŽ, analyzing the encounters, correspondences and interactions between Italian and Yugoslav antifascist women, both bilaterally and in relation to the foundation of the Women's International Democratic Federation. This reconstruction aims to show that Italian and Yugoslav women's organizations and their members actively engaged in Cold War political struggles. National interests and conflicts over the city of Trieste emerged and were transposed into the international arena by the UDI and the AFŽ. At the same time, antifascist unity and communist internationalism favored the establishment of links of cooperation, and strengthened the role of the Yugoslav revolutionary model as an example for Italian male and female militants. The Yugoslav Federation – the closest neighboring socialist country modeled after the Soviet Union – raised great hopes among Italian antifascists, who resented Italy's postwar conservative politics.

In the third section, in order to stress the importance of the neighboring socialist "dreamworld" (Buck-Morss 2000), I introduce the case study of women's postwar organizing in the border city of Trieste, and of the UDAIS, the Union of Antifascist Italo-Slovene Women in the Julian Region, which was more influenced by the Yugoslav AFŽ – and by its Slovenian branch – than by the Italian UDI. The case study of Trieste is crucial in understanding the significance of the dream of the socialist East for antifascists living in the contested border area. The case of the UDAIS – and its relationship with the UDI, the AFŽ and the WIDF – shows the geopolitical specificity of Cold War Trieste. The singularity of the local geopolitical setting greatly affected women's organizing and their political mobilizations. The case of Trieste also illustrates women's crucial role in promoting postwar and early Cold War ideological discourses (which were themselves highly gendered). In this chapter, therefore, I not only describe women's transnational activism developed in the early Cold War period between Italy, Yugoslavia and the Italo-Yugoslav border area, but also show how local, national and international activism were interrelated in complex, multi-layered ways.

## 1. The Women's International Democratic Federation (WIDF)

– Destroy Fascism,  
- Guarantee democracy and peace in the world,  
- Ameliorate women's conditions,  
- Prepare a happy future for the generations to come.  
In sum, this means working for the triumph of justice in all the domains.  
This is our big dream.  
(Eugénie Cotton's opening speech at 1945 WIDF founding congress).<sup>11</sup>

The Women's International Democratic Federation must be viewed  
as an instrument of Soviet political warfare with  
military objectives primarily in mind.  
(Report on the Congress of American Women, by the  
Committee on Un-American Activities, HUAC 1949: 24)

The history of the Women's International Democratic Federation (WIDF), a mass organization affiliating millions of women internationally, has been ignored for decades as a result of the Cold War anticommunist legacy. The Committee of Un-American Activities (HUAC) under McCarthy had, in fact, depicted this organization as "an instrument of Soviet political warfare" in 1949. The members of its American branch, the Congress of American Women (CAW), were in fact the objects of a fierce red-baiting campaign (Lerner 2002; Storrs 2003; Horowitz 1998). With this study I wish to contribute to the growing post-Cold War scholarly literature on the WIDF, which has started to unravel the forgotten history of this organization, and its significance for women's transnationalism in the twentieth century (De Haan 2010a; Ilić 2010). Despite having been represented in a stereotypical fashion, the WIDF was, in fact, a complex political entity that cannot be reduced in any way to a simple instrument of Soviet propaganda. As I will show in this chapter, the Women's International Democratic Federation affiliated in 1945 women from different background and political orientations, who were genuinely invested in the project of an internationalist, antifascist, anti-colonial and pacifist federation of women. Some WIDF members had been long-standing feminists and social reformers before the war (De Haan 2010a; Weigand 2001; Lerner 2002). Although the Soviet political line was enforced upon the

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11 "De notre Conférence doivent sortir des solutions constructives. La plus importante sera sans doute la création d'une grande Association internationale qui coordonnera l'activité de toutes ses adhérentes vers les buts que nous nous sommes données: – détruire le fascisme – assurer dans le Monde la démocratie et la paix – Améliorer la condition des femmes – Préparer un avenir heureux aux futures générations. Ce qui veut dire, en somme, travailler à faire régner la justice dans tous les domaines. Tel est notre grand rêve." Discours d'ouverture de Madame Cotton, Congrès Constitutif, 26.11.2010-1.12.1945, Paris, Palais de la Mutualité. In Arhiv Jugoslavije, Beograd, Fond Antifašistički Front Žena Jugoslavije (1942-1953) 141-17-115.

WIDF as of Cold War tensions started to mount (1949-1953, see Chapter 5), a number of dissenting voices were always present. As Ilić notes (2010), the WIDF “served not only as a forum for extensive cultural exchange during the decades of the Cold War, especially where the status of women was concerned, but also as a site in which the cultural gaps that existed between women from different nations could be identified and discussed.” The existence of multiple political and national positions within the WIDF is alluded to throughout this study, by referring to the perspective of both its Italian and Yugoslav members.

As shown by a number of scholars, from the mid-1950s the Federation was deeply affected by the emergence of women’s anti-colonial movements, and gradually became a global organization in favor of women’s rights across the world, contributing to initiate and promote the 1975 UN decade for women (De Haan 2010a; Caine 2010; Ghodsee 2010; see also Chapter 7). In the first part of the chapter I will look at the WIDF founding Congress in 1945, and at some of the WIDF activities in the postwar period, arguing that a number of resolutions and reports approved by the WIDF were extremely groundbreaking for their times. WIDF analyses developed a class-based, anti-colonial, anti-racist analysis of women’s conditions, or what would be defined today an intersectional analysis, combining a critique of gender, race and class relations. In the next section I describe how the WIDF worked for women’s emancipation and women’s rights, in the context of to issues like fascism, colonialism and racial discrimination, and I emphasize the role played by Italian and Yugoslav members within the WIDF since its founding Congress in 1945.

#### 1.1. The WIDF founding congress (November 1945, Paris) and the initial activities of the WIDF

Between the 26th of November and the first of December 1945, the WIDF Constitutive Congress was held in Paris at the Palais de la Mutualité, and was attended by representatives from Algeria, Argentina, Australia, Austria, Albania, Belgium, Bulgaria, Brazil, Chili, China, Czechoslovakia, Colombia, Denmark, Egypt, the United States, Finland, Lebanon, Luxembourg, Morocco, Mexico, Norway, Palestine, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Sweden, Switzerland, Spain, the USSR, Uruguay, France and Yugoslavia. The women who were present identified themselves as having fought a common struggle against war and fascism. Many of them had been arrested for their antifascist activities; some had been tortured, and others had lost members of their families during the war. This contributed to a general feeling of international solidarity during the first WIDF congress. As an Indian delegate said,

This war has taught us to love each other, to get close to each other. It helped us to understand that the destiny of other men cannot leave us indifferent, that the freedom and happiness of each depends upon the freedom and the happiness of all. We have learnt that the freedom of a nation, of a race, is linked to the destiny of the

whole of humanity, and that the misfortune of a people announces and prepares the misfortune and catastrophe of other peoples, too.<sup>12</sup>

Within different reports of the WIDF founding meeting in 1945, one notes a strong feeling of women's antifascist solidarity, beyond differences of ethnicity, race and religion. Italian women's accounts of these meetings are not always devoid of racial and ethnic stereotyping, proving the resilience of colonial representations in postwar Europe. But the focus is nonetheless on the fact that women from different nationalities and social backgrounds share the same antifascist engagement. Antifascist militant Ada Marchesini Gobetti<sup>13</sup> tells about the first Paris WIDF meeting as follows: "I will tell you, even from a picturesque point of view, there were women of all species: there were Indians, Algerians, some with towels around their heads, some Chinese, some Americans, women of all types we could imagine: women from different worlds, who all spoke the same language."<sup>14</sup>

In her inaugural speech at the 1945 Constitutive Congress, WIDF President Eugénie Cotton<sup>15</sup> commemorated the victims of the war and stressed the "immorality" of fascist ideology. She said that the "immorality of a doctrine that negated the dignity of the human being, which exploited man more harshly than the beast, who systematically put science at the service of the most barbaric cruelty, appalled the consciousness of all honest people." Antifascism was presented not as a political position, but as an issue of "moral sanity and wisdom: we cannot allow madmen and criminals

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12 Quoted in Mitra Mitrović, "Importance d'une union démocratique des femmes du monde entier" in Arhiv Jugoslavije, Beograd, Fond Antifašistički Front Žena Jugoslavije (1942-1953) 141-17-386.

13 Ada Marchesini Gobetti (born Prospero, in Turin, 1902-1968) was a teacher, translator and journalist. In 1923 she married Piero Gobetti, a socialist writer and politician, who died in exile in Paris in February 1926 as a result of being assaulted by Fascist squads for his antifascist positions. Widowed, and with a month-old baby, Ada Gobetti continued her antifascist activities. In 1937 she married Ettore Marchesini. During Second World War she, together with her eighteen-year-old son, engaged in the Resistance struggle in the Turin region, providing connections between Italy and France (See Gobetti 1973). After the war she was affiliated with the Action Party (Partito d'Azione) and became vice-mayor of Turin. In 1956 she joined the communist party. All her life she was engaged in teaching and in alternative pedagogies.

14 "Anche dal punto di vista pittoresco vi dirò che c'erano donne di tutte le specie: c'erano le donne indiane, quelle algerine, alcune con degli asciugamani in testa, c'erano delle cinesi, delle americane, insomma c'erano donne di tutti i tipi che noi potessimo immaginare: donne di mondi diversi che parlavano tutte lo stesso linguaggio." Ada Gobetti, Consiglio Nazionale dell'UDI, 13-14 gennaio 1946, in Archivio Centrale UDI, Roma, fondo cronologico, B7 fascicolo 89.

15 Eugénie Cotton (born Feytis, 1881-1967) was a scientist and a communist politician. After having graduated in Physics in 1904, she became a teacher in the École Normale Supérieure de Jeunes Filles in Poitiers. In 1913 she married Aimé Auguste Cotton, a physician and teacher in the École Normale of Saint-Cloud. Later she became a director of the École Nationale Supérieure in Sèvres. A member of the French Communist Party, she supported German and Spanish antifascist exiles in the 1930s. During the Second World War she was forced to leave her academic position by the Vichy government, and her husband was imprisoned during the German occupation. She was one of the founders of Union des Femmes Françaises in 1944, and the president of the WIDF from 1945.



to act as they wish.” The main tasks of the newly founded women’s Federation, therefore, were the destruction of Fascism, the establishment of peace and democracy, the achievement of better lives for women and children, or, “to sum up, working in order that justice will triumph in all the domains.”<sup>16</sup>

This ideal of social and political justice in all domains was expressed through a number of resolutions approved during the 1945 Paris Congress. In the *Resolution on the economic, juridical and social situation of women*<sup>17</sup>, WIDF members pointed out that women had demonstrated their equality with men in the struggle against fascism. Nonetheless, in “almost all countries” – with the implicit exception of the Soviet Union – women had an inferior status, and in most of colonial countries they were still in a slave-like state. The Resolution stated that full freedom and democracy could only exist if women were fully included in political and social life. The Resolution demanded women’s right to vote and to be elected, equal education, work and equal welfare, and equality in marriage, divorce, and inheritance. It also recommended the creation of institutions that would allow women to reconcile their duties as citizens, mothers and workers; the administration of justice in the postwar reconstruction effort, the elevation of general living standards, the end of black marketeering and the unequal distribution of resources, the provision of affordable accommodations, water and electricity in the countryside, as well as invalidity pensions for those in need.

In another *Resolution on the problems of children and education* – the text of which was prepared by the Yugoslav delegation – the damage to children and the youth caused by Fascism and Nazism were listed in detail. Schooling under fascism was “in service of their ideology of violence, contempt and hatred of the human being.”<sup>18</sup> Education, therefore, had to be truly democratized, and free access to schools had to be guaranteed, also in colonial countries. Significantly, after the experience of Italianization of schools under Fascism, the Yugoslav delegation stressed the importance of mother tongue education, also in colonial countries, where many children were still schooled in a foreign language, the language of the colonizers.<sup>19</sup>

As a result of the antifascist alliance between the USSR, the USA, Britain and France, the issue of colonialism was not yet raised at the 1945 WIDF founding Congress.<sup>20</sup> After the beginning of the Cold War and the break between the former West-

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16 “Discours d’ouverture de Madame Cotton”, Congrès Constitutif, 26.11.2010 - 1.12.1945, Paris, Palais de la Mutualité. In Arhiv Jugoslavije, Beograd, Fond Antifašistički Front Žena Jugoslavije (1942-1953) 141-17-107.

17 Ibidem.

18 “Résolution sur la situation économique, juridique et sociale des femmes”, Congrès Constitutif, 26.11.2010 - 1.12.1945, Paris, Palais de la Mutualité. In Arhiv Jugoslavije, Beograd, Fond Antifašistički Front Žena Jugoslavije (1942-1953) 141-17-295.

19 “Résolution du Congrès International des Femmes des 26-30 Novembre 1945 sur les problèmes de l’enfance et l’éducation” Congrès Constitutif, 26.11.2010 - 1.12.1945, Paris, Palais de la Mutualité. In Arhiv Jugoslavije, Beograd, Fond Antifašistički Front Žena Jugoslavije (1942-1953) 141-17-303.

20 In an article published in the magazine *Žena u Borbi* after the Yugoslav delegates had been expelled from the Federation, in the early 1950s, AFŽ leader and former president Anka Berus noted that during the 1945 WIDF Congress the representatives of the four great Allies, the USSR, the USA, Britain and France had had a leading role, while colonized countries only had a sec-

ern and Soviet Allies, however, the WIDF representatives became very vocal about colonialism. During the 1947 Prague Council a *Report on the colonial problem and on the situation of women and children in colonial and semi-colonial countries* was distributed.<sup>21</sup> This report referred to the United Nations' increasing engagement with the independence and the self-determination of colonial territories<sup>22</sup>, and explicitly referred to the 1945 San Francisco UN charter. The report claimed that colonial methods were completely illegitimate, and that no one, seeing the misery of the colonies and the exploitation of their inhabitants, would believe that colonialism could ever have any "civilizing" effect. Instead, all peoples, including colonial peoples, were now part of a global movement for emancipation which had started during the war against fascism.<sup>23</sup>

The report also analyzed the condition of women in the colonies in detail. Every woman in the colonies was designated as a "slave of a slave", to describe women's double oppression, under patriarchy and under colonialism. Essentialist depictions of colonial women were also criticized as instrumental to colonial domination: "First of all we should strongly reject the widespread argument surrounding the woman in the colonies, according to which in this or the other colony 'the woman will not be able to emancipate herself since she's the being sacrificed to religion, ancient customs etc...she is too passive and subjected to the will of her parents, brothers or husband.'" Against these essentialist arguments, the WIDF report pointed out the many differences among colonial peoples, and that many advanced civilizations had developed in

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ondary position. Berus mentioned that the 1945 Congress resolution denounced fascism, but failed to mention imperialism in order not to upset the Western powers. Delegations from the colonies, however, would sarcastically note that colonial exploitation and terror did not differ from what they heard during the Congress about fascist acts in the occupied countries. Anka Berus, "Sjećanja sa osnivačkog kongresa MDFŽ 1945. godine u Parizu", *Žena U Borbi*, In Arhiv Jugoslavije, Beograd, Fond Antifašistički Front Žena Jugoslavije (1942-1953) 141-17-412.

21 "Rapport sur les Problèmes Coloniaux et la Situation des Femmes et des Enfants Dans les Pays Coloniaux et Semi-coloniaux", Conseil de la FDI, Prague, 26 Février 1947. in Arhiv Jugoslavije, Beograd, Fond Antifašistički Front Žena Jugoslavije (1942-1953) 141-18-189.

22 Although this is rarely remembered at present, in 1947 the Western powers still maintained most of their colonial possessions, so that more than a quarter of countries and 689 million inhabitants were under colonial domination, according to the WIDF report. The colonial powers included Britain, France, Belgium, the Netherlands, Portugal, Spain and Denmark, but also the U.S. if one counted their domination in the Philippines. Moreover, countries like Spain and Portugal remained under a Fascist dictatorship, while in Greece a civil war had started between pro-Western monarchic troops and pro-Soviet communist guerrillas. The WIDF report also contained a condemnation of the French intervention in Vietnam against the Vietminh movement.

23 At the end of World War Two, a number of revolts started in colonial territories, such as the Sétif and Guelma revolt in Algeria in May 1945, which was violently repressed by the French. The connection between the antifascist Resistance and the anticolonial struggle is also made evident in the biographies of anticolonial leaders, for instance in the biography of Martinican intellectual and psychiatrist Frantz Fanon, who fought in the French Army in World War II, and later opposed French colonialism in Algeria. See Cherki (2006).

Africa and Asia, so that it would be “impossible to attribute to all women in the colonies the same defects or characters.”<sup>24</sup> Instead, as the Indian representatives reported, it was British conservatives who had blocked any law that could ameliorate women’s status, saying “it would offend our [Indian] religious prejudices.”<sup>25</sup>

In that same 1947 WIDF Prague council, another Resolution condemned the discrimination of “Negro women” and racial segregation in the South of the United States, following a report of the Congress of American Women on the “condition of Negro women”. The report analyzed in detail the double discrimination suffered by Afro-American women in the fields of citizenship, health, accommodation and labor. The condition of domestic workers and service workers particularly was considered in detail, illustrated with a number of statistical data. In the Southern states, the legacy of slavery was still present, and the report stated that Black women still “fell prey” to White men as they had during slavery.<sup>26</sup>

The resolutions mentioned here – covering only some of the campaigns developed by the Women’s International Democratic Federation in the immediate postwar years – show that this international organization and its national branches merit more in depth study, and that the WIDF wasn’t at all a homogeneous entity. Moreover, as De Haan (2010a) has noted, the WIDF deserves to be studied particularly in relation to decolonization movements and Third World women’s struggles against racism and colonial exploitation. In a recent keynote lecture, historian Barbara Caine (2010) has

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24 “Nous devons d’abord réfuter énergiquement un argument amplement répandu concernant la femme des colonies, c’est celui qui consiste à dire dans telle ou telle colonie, ‘la femme ne parviendra point à s’émanciper elle est l’être sacrifié par la religion, les coutumes ancestrales, etc...elle est beaucoup trop passive et soumise à la volonté de ses parents, de ses frères ou de son mari.’ Il y a lieu de remarquer que les peuples coloniaux représentent des différences très grandes et extrêmement nombreuses, entre eux. (...) Par conséquent, il y a diversité de races, de religions, de coutumes et de civilisations, il est donc impossible d’attribuer à toutes les femmes des colonies les memes défauts ou traits de caractère.” Rapport sur les Problèmes Coloniaux et la Situation des Femmes et des Enfants Dans les Pays Coloniaux et Semi-coloniaux, Conseil de la FDIF, Prague, 26 Février 1947. In Arhiv Jugoslavije, Beograd, Fond Antifašistički Front Žena Jugoslavije (1942-1953) 141-18-206.

25 “Il est intéressant de rapporter ici la déclaration d’une déléguée des Indes au Congrès International constitutif de Novembre 1945: ‘(Aux Indes), Pendant plus de cent ans, toute législation sociale progressive a été freinée par les conservateurs britanniques qui se sont succédés. Ils disent que cela offenserait nos préjugés religieux. Ainsi donc nos anciennes loix féodales nous pétrifient et nous emprisonnent.” Ibidem.

26 See “Rapport sur les femmes nègres aux États-Unis, préparée par le Congrès des Femmes Américaines...” and “Resolution sur la situation des femmes nègres aux États-Unis”, adoptée à l’unanimité par le Conseil de la FDIF, à Prague, le 26.2.1947, in Arhiv Jugoslavije, Beograd, Fond Antifašistički Front Žena Jugoslavije (1942-1953) 141-18-213. As Weigand has stressed in her *Red Feminism*, “progressive feminists” linked to the CAW and to the American Communist Party had developed an analysis of multiple oppressions and paved the way for second wave feminist and Civil Rights movements. They “sustained a small but vibrant women’s movement through the 1940s and 1950s and transmitted influential terminology, tactics, and concepts to the next generation of feminists” (2001: 3).

highlighted the importance of a trip to Eastern Germany and the Soviet bloc for South African anti-apartheid activist Lillian Ngoyi, within the framework of the WIDF. Further research on this organization and on the transnational interactions between its members could prove illuminating for intersectional feminist analysis, and would deepen our understandings of the potential and limits of transnational feminist and women's rights networks. It could also highlight a number of connections between the so-called Second and Third world during the Cold War, and the importance for the formation of anti-colonial movements of the connection to the socialist bloc (see Chari and Verdery 2009; see also Lee 2010).

Since this is not within the scope of my research, I have only mentioned some of the key issues at stake when opening the forgotten, fragmented and under-researched archive of the Women's International Democratic Federation, a major organization affiliating thousands of women across the world and whose political and social activism extended from 1945 until 1989.<sup>27</sup> I discuss the phenomenon of decolonization and its impact on Italian and Yugoslav women's organizations in greater detail in Chapter 7. In the next section I will describe how Italian and Yugoslav women's organizations contributed to the foundation of the WIDF after 1945, and how they established bilateral and multilateral relations in the aftermath of the war.

## **2. Transnational encounters in the postwar period: the Yugoslav example**

In 1945 some of the women that had been involved in the Union of Italian Women and in the Antifascist Women's Front of Yugoslavia actively contributed to the foundation of the Women's International Democratic Federation<sup>28</sup> and formed the national branches of the Federation. Several diplomatic trips and bilateral exchanges between delegations of different internationalist women's organizations started taking place. When engaging in international activities abroad, however, the representatives of the Italian and Yugoslav women's organizations occupied very different geopolitical positions.

Italian women traveling abroad felt strongly that they had to bear the burden of guilt for Fascist crimes and oppression towards other populations, despite their personal antifascist engagement. For this reason, Italian antifascist women attempted to work towards a redefinition of Italian national identity, one that would encompass the antifascist struggle, and uncouple the equation between Italy and the Fascist regime. Unlike the Italian antifascists, Yugoslav antifascist women had been part of the most successful Resistance movement in Europe, one that needed only marginal support from the Allies, and that managed to establish a revolutionary regime afterwards. Yugoslavia was the "dutiful daughter" of the Soviet Union, and the Yugoslav representa-

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27 An organization with this name in fact still exists today, and its headquarters are located in Brasil since 2007. See <http://www.fdim-widf.org/>

28 The countries that made up the initial steering committee were France, Britain, Belgium, China, Spain [with exiled republican representatives, notably Dolores Ibarruri], Italy, the Soviet Union and Yugoslavia.

tives could express their pride in international meetings, positioning themselves as models for the rest of Europe, and South-Eastern Europe in particular.

As I will show in the following pages, the different positions of Italian and Yugoslav delegations are apparent in their interaction with the Women's International Democratic Federation, as well as in the statements given by Italian and Yugoslav representatives when participating in congresses of other women's organizations abroad. At the same time, during transnational encounters Italian and Yugoslav women strived to find a common antifascist, internationalist language despite national divisions and past legacies of conflict. In this section I will analyze the different political stances of Yugoslav and Italian women's delegations during WIDF postwar congresses. Secondly, I will reconstruct the Italo-Yugoslav encounters that took place in the postwar period, and highlight the strong fascination with the Yugoslav model that emerged among the antifascist left in Italy and in the Italo-Yugoslav border area.

### 2.1. Yugoslav women's international recognition and the claim over Trieste

Yugoslav women enjoyed a position of great admiration and respect during international meetings after the war. At the first 1945 WIDF congress in Paris, the Yugoslav delegation was "loudly and warmly acclaimed", and the heroic Yugoslav anti-Nazi resistance was celebrated in a number of speeches, alongside the heroic struggle of the Soviet Union. According to Anka Berus<sup>29</sup>, "the name of comrade Tito raised enthusiasm among all the delegates."<sup>30</sup> In her praise of Yugoslavia, the legendary Dolores Ibarruri<sup>31</sup> warmly remembered the Yugoslav antifascists who were part of the

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29 Anka Berus (1903-1991) was born in Split, and graduated in Literature in Ljubljana. She joined the workers movement as a student, and continued as a teacher of the girls' gymnasium in Split, where she was soon targeted by the authorities for her unconventional ideas. In 1936 she was arrested for her revolutionary activities and detained for two years in the Požarevac prison. In 1939 she was imprisoned in the camp Lepoglava for two months, and later assigned to forced residency in Celje, Slovenia. From there she joined the Resistance in Zagreb, where she engaged in antifascist activities against the Ustasha regime. In 1942 she moved to the liberated territory and had an important role in organizing the Resistance and the insurrection in the Croatian Littoral. After the war, she was minister of the Croatian government from 1945 to 1949 and Minister of Finances of the Croatian Republic from 1950 to 1953. She was awarded the title of National Hero for her partisan activities.

30 Anka Berus, "Sjećanja sa osnivačkog kongresa MĐFŽ 1945. godine u Parizu", *Žena U Borbi*, In Arhiv Jugoslavije, Beograd, Fond Antifašistički Front Žena Jugoslavije (1942-1953) 141-17-412.

31 Dolores Ibarruri (1895-1989), also known as La Pasionaria, was the most prominent Spanish female antifascist politician. Born in a poor miners' family in the Basque country, and married to a socialist miner, she took part in the general strike of 1917. She had six children, four girls who died very young, one who outlived her mother, and a son who was killed during Second World War in the battle of Stalingrad. From 1920 she was active in the communist party, and in 1931 she moved to Madrid, where she became the editor of the journal *Mundo Obrero*. She was a delegate to the Moscow Comintern in 1933. Elected to the Republican Parliament in 1936, she became a Republican leader during the Spanish Civil War (she coined the famous

international brigades during the Spanish civil war.<sup>32</sup> Upon suggestion of the Italian delegation, the WIDF approved a statement of congratulations for the founding of the new Yugoslav Republic on the 29<sup>th</sup> of November 1945.<sup>33</sup> The high esteem in which Yugoslav representatives were held is illustrated in a report about the congress by AFŽ leader Mitra Mitrović.<sup>34</sup> In her article for the official newspaper *Borba* (subsequently translated into French), Mitrović reported that:

Our country, thanks to the struggle against Fascism and the democratic system that it's realizing, occupied an important place during the Congress, among so many countries from the whole world (...) Anka Berus was always at the presidency of the Congress, doctor Olga Milošević read the report – prepared by Yugoslavia – on the protection and education of children, and in every commission a representative of Yugoslavia was present. Our delegation was proud, and rightly so, of the part our women had taken in the struggle for freedom; of their heroism, or their unity and of our organization counting three million women. Our struggle, and the results we have obtained, are quoted as an example by the antifascist women of the whole world.<sup>35</sup>

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slogan "No Pasaran !"). After the victory of Franco in 1939 she went into exile in Moscow. From 1944 until 1960 she was the Secretary General of the PCE, the Spanish Communist Party. She returned to Spain in 1975 after the demise of Franco's fascist regime, and was elected to the Spanish Parliament in 1977.

32 Anka Berus, "Sjećanja sa osnivačkog kongresa MDFŽ 1945. godine u Parizu", *Žena U Borbi*, In Arhiv Jugoslavije, Beograd, Fond Antifašistički Front Žena Jugoslavije (1942-1953) 141-17-412.

33 "Les organisations Italiennes adhérentes à la Fédération Démocratique Internationale des Femmes Proposent que le télégramme suivant soit adressé à la nouvelle République Yougoslave : 'La Fédération démocratique Internationale des Femmes réunies à leur premier Congrès salue avec enthousiasme la Nouvelle République Yougoslave et félicite les vaillantes populations qui, par leur courage et leur sacrifice ont permis se réaliser dans leur pays une véritable démocratie. La Fédération démocratique Internationale des Femmes salue l'assemblée Constituante qui va affirmer dans la Constitution tous les droits que les femmes yougoslaves ont conquis dans le Combat.'" Arhiv Jugoslavije, Beograd, Fond Antifašistički Front Žena Jugoslavije (1942-1953) 141-17-379.

34 Mitra Mitrović (1912-2001) was born in Užička Požega, Serbia, in a working class family. She studied Literature at the University of Belgrade, where she conducted clandestine communist activities. She also became the president of the youth section of the interwar Women's Alliance. Mitrović organized demonstrations for equal rights for women and was editor of the monthly *Žena Danas* from 1936 onwards. Arrested by the Gestapo in 1941, she was detained in the concentration camp Banjica, from which she managed to escape. From September 1941 she had important responsibilities in the Serbian liberation movement, where she worked in the Agit-Prop and organized the first AFŽ Congress of Bosanski Petrovac. After the war she was a leading member of the party, and among other tasks she held the position of Minister of Education in the Serbian Republic. She was married to communist leader Milovan Đilas from 1936 until 1952. Because she supported her husband in his dissident activities, she was marginalized from politics in the early fifties, at the age of 41. See Perović (2001).

35 Mitra Mitrović, "Importance d'une union démocratique des femmes du monde entier" in Arhiv Jugoslavije, Beograd, Fond Antifašistički Front Žena Jugoslavije (1942-1953) 141-17-386.

Mitra Mitrović expresses here a strong sense of pride for the efforts accomplished, a pride that also entitled Yugoslav women to situate themselves as an example to the neighboring countries: “the Balkan and Central European countries wait for our help and see us as a powerful support, thanks to the experience and the force of our movement, and thanks to the democracy being built in our country, as the delegates from all neighboring countries have declared to us.”<sup>36</sup>

In her memories of the Congress, Anka Berus relates that all other delegations were interested in the AFŽ activities, and asked them for advice, notably the Albanian and the Bulgarian delegations. The AFŽ mediated between the Czechoslovak and Hungarian delegations in discussing the fate of the Hungarian minority in Czechoslovakia.<sup>37</sup> Moreover, since it was difficult to reach the countries of Eastern and South-Eastern Europe in the immediate postwar aftermath, Yugoslav representatives were asked by the WIDF to serve as a relay between Paris and women’s organizations in the rest of the Balkans.<sup>38</sup> Another very clear sign of the prominence of the Yugoslav delegation was the request from the WIDF to hold the next congress in Belgrade in 1947.<sup>39</sup>

The Yugoslav delegates, therefore, certain of their national successes and of their international support, could also express their claim over the contested harbor city of Trieste in international meetings. As I will show in section three of this chapter, the battle for the assignment of Trieste to Yugoslavia became one of the first major Cold War battles in Europe. An argument in favor of a Yugoslav Trieste was the ethnic composition of the city, in which many Slovenes lived (see Chapter 2). Equally important was the idea that because of the war sacrifices of the antifascist patriots, the city deserved to be assigned to the socialist camp, and not to Italy, since Italy was seen as not yet fully democratic and always prey to conservative tendencies (see further in this chapter, section 3).<sup>40</sup>

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36 Among the tasks the WIDF Congress gave to the AFŽ, Mitrović mentioned “aider par notre exemple et notre secours immédiat les mouvements dans les pays voisins, – pays balcaniques, pays d’Europe centrale, – qui, à cause de notre expérience et de la force de notre mouvement (...) attendent de nous une aide et attendent de nous un puissant appui.” Ibidem. The role of Yugoslavia as a regional power in the Balkans would eventually lead to the 1948 conflict with the Soviet Union. See Chapter 5.

37 Anka Berus, “Sjećanja sa osnivačkog kongresa MDFŽ 1945. godine u Parizu”, *Žena U Borbi*, In Arhiv Jugoslavije, Beograd, Fond Antifašistički Front Žena Jugoslavije (1942-1953) 141-17-412.

38 Letter from Nicole de Barry to Olga Milosević, on behalf of Comité d’Initiative Internationale pour la préparation et l’organisation d’un congrès international des femmes, Paris, 16.10.1945. Arhiv Jugoslavije, Beograd, Fond Antifašistički Front Žena Jugoslavije (1942-1953) 141-17-39.

39 As explained in Chapter 5, this would never happen. The second WIDF congress would be held in Budapest in the spring of 1948 and AFŽ would be expelled from the WIDF in the autumn of 1949.

40 Luciana Castellina heard similar arguments in Zenica in 1947. Her British comrades, notably, stated: “You [Italians] were Fascist, they [the Yugoslavs] have lost one million seven hundred thousand people in the war.” After this, she recalled, “I am upset: the Trieste I know, my family, is Italian. I still knew little about the way in which the Fascists treated the Slovenes and only now do I start to understand what the war that has led my country to occupy Yugoslavia

After the WIDF Congress in Paris, the Yugoslav claim over Trieste was expressed once again during the first UDI Congress, held in Florence in October 1945. The Yugoslav delegation did not obtain visas for the Congress, but the representative<sup>41</sup> of the Union of Italian and Slovene women (UDAIS) of Trieste gave a speech that reflects the Yugoslav stance. As I will show in section 3, Trieste left-wing organizations were in fact dominated by the hegemony of Yugoslav politics from 1945 to the summer of 1948, and supported the transfer of the city from Italy to Yugoslavia. The Trieste representative made the following statement in Florence:

For the liberation of Trieste, Italians and Slavs have fought united and Tito's troops have sacrificed 6000 men to liberate the city. I'd like some comrades to come to Trieste, and to ask the Triestini how Tito's Army had behaved. In forty days we constituted our popular government, with two thirds Italians and one third Slavs. And in these few days we have built kindergartens and schools, and provided food to the city. On the 12th of July the Yugoslav troops had to abandon Trieste. And what happened? In Trieste the freedom fighters, those who always fought against fascism, are imprisoned, while those who are guilty are set free.<sup>42</sup>

The UDAIS representative stressed the brotherhood of Italian and Slavic partisans, and emphasized the benefits of the 40 days of Yugoslav administration instated in the city after the arrival of Yugoslav partisans on the 1st of May 1945, until the Allied troops took over the command of the contested city. The 40 days of Yugoslav administration – that the UDAIS describes in a very positive light – were portrayed in the pro-Italian press in Trieste and Italy as an invasion of the city by hordes of “Orientals” and as a fate worse than German occupation, exploiting previous anti-Slavic and anti-communist feelings. Workers and peasants in Trieste, on the other hand, favourably anticipated the possible annexation of the city by socialist Yugoslavia (see Sluga 2001; see also section 3 of this chapter).

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has been (...). I do not dare to respond, but I feel uneasy, upset” Castellina (2011: 246).

41 Her name has been transcribed in the archive as ‘Marta Vemecic’, but this should most probably be Marija Bernetić, the late 1940s UDAIS leader. Intervention by ‘Marta Vemecic’ [Marija Bernetić] at the First UDI Congress, 20-23 October 1945. Rome, AC UDI, UDI Cronologico, B7, file 69. The Yugoslav delegation had been denied visas for this UDI conference; women from UDAIS, that is, Slovene and Italian women from zone A of the FTT, could participate.

42 “Per la liberazione di Trieste, italiani e slavi hanno lottato uniti e le truppe di Tito per liberare la città hanno sacrificato 6000 uomini. Sarebbe mio desiderio che qualche compagna potesse venire a Trieste e chiedesse ai triestini come si è comportato questo esercito di Tito. Durante quaranta giorni abbiamo costituito il nostro potere popolare formato di due terzi di italiani e un terzo di slavi. E in questi pochi giorni abbiamo costruito asili, scuole, abbiamo provveduto all’approvvigionamento della città. Il 12 luglio le truppe jugoslave dovettero abbandonare Trieste. Cosa successe? Successe questo : che a Trieste i combattenti per la libertà, quelli che hanno lottato sempre contro il fascismo, oggi si mettono in galera e si rilasciano invece quelli che sono colpevoli.” Ibidem.



## 2.2. Italian women abroad: the uncoupling of Italian identity from Fascism

Italian delegates from the UDI and other left-wing organizations, in their first international encounters after twenty years of isolation under Fascism, were attempting to redeem the image of Italy abroad, by trying to show that Italy wasn't only Fascist Italy, but rather that "another Italy" had existed and fought against Fascism from the very beginning. In her report on the WIDF 1945 Congress, Ada Gobetti relates that some Italian comrades were surprised when they heard the representatives of other countries speaking about Fascist oppression and violence. Some Italian comrades thought, "they are resentful against us", meaning against Italians. Gobetti explains that this could be an understandable, reflex reaction. However, she added:

It was important to thoroughly separate the responsibilities of the Italian people from Fascism. Our comrade [Camilla] Ravera gave a magnificent presentation in which she declared in front of women of the whole world that Italy has never been Fascist Italy, and she coined a beautiful phrase that got a lot of praise, that is: 'in Fascist Italy, Italy addressed the world not from the balcony of Piazza Venezia, but from the rooms of the Tribunale Speciale' [the court judging political prisoners]; and she knew it well [Ravera had spent several years in exile and in prison]. She took up the task to show what Fascism really was. Even if Fascism was named after the Italian case, we should not say that it has been only an Italian phenomenon (...).<sup>43</sup>

Once she had stated that Fascism wasn't only an Italian phenomenon, Camilla Ravera<sup>44</sup> (as reported by Ada Gobetti) explained that there were different forms of

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43 "(...) io ho notato che qualcuna delle nostre compagne delegate quasi si sorprendevo quando sentivano parlare le delegate di un altro Paese di oppressione e della violenze fasciste, e dicevano : "Qui ce l'hanno con noi." Poteva essere qualche cosa come epidermica ed una cosa comprensibile. In ogni modo era opportuno che si scindessero bene le responsabilità del popolo italiano dal fascismo. La nostra compagna Ravera ha fatto una magnifica esposizione in cui ha veramente dichiarato davanti a tutte le donne di tutto il mondo che l'Italia non è stata mai l'Italia fascista ed ha detto una bella frase che è tanto piaciuta e cioè che nell'Italia del fascismo, l'Italia ha parlato al mondo non dal balcone di Palazzo Venezia, ma dalle sale del Tribunale Speciale ; e lei ne sapeva qualche cosa. Si è incaricata di far sapere che cosa era il fascismo. Se noi abbiamo dato il nome al fascismo, non dobbiamo dire che il fascismo sia un fenomeno soltanto italiano." Ada Gobetti, Consiglio Nazionale dell'UDI, 13-14 gennaio 1946, in Archivio Centrale UDI, Rome, fondo cronologico, B7 fascicolo 89.

44 Camilla Ravera (1889-1988), a socialist teacher from Acqui Terme, had been among the founders of the Communist Party of Italy in 1921. She was in charge of the feminine section of the PCI and the editor of the journal *La Compagna* (The Comradess). In 1927 she went into exile and was named secretary of the party for three years. Arrested in 1930 by Fascist authorities, she was sentenced to 15 years of imprisonment. She was detained for 5 years and later sent to the "confino" in the islands of Ponza and Ventotene. In 1939 she opposed the Molotov-Ribbentrop pact and was expelled from the party, to which she was readmitted in 1945. After the war she became a communist MP and was involved in the leadership of the UDI. In 1951 she published a history of the women's movement in Italy from 1861 until the Second World War (see Ravera

Fascism, not only in Italy and Germany but also in Belgium, Romania, Yugoslavia, Croatia, Spain, and France. Fascism was able to spread because of the complicity of democratic countries with Mussolini, and was the result of capitalist and nationalist interests coalesced against the working classes. Because of this speech, adds Gobetti, “our position really improved”, and Italian women managed to obtain a place in the Executive Committee of the WIDF.<sup>45</sup>

Similar statements were uttered by the Italian delegation during their visit to the first AFŽ postwar congress in the summer of 1945. The following statement is a typical *representative* text (Sklevicky 1996) that shows how UDI women portrayed themselves to their AFŽ comrades and expressed their wish to cooperate. Jole Lombardi declared on the 20th of June, the third day of the congress:

We, representing the Italian women, want to tell you that the Italian people and the Italian women are sincerely antifascist: having lived through the painful experience of fascism for an entire generation and having been submitted to its most disastrous consequences, we felt the deep desire that a similar regime of reaction and imperialism would never be resurrected. (...) We guarantee to you therefore that we, Italian women, like you, Yugoslav women, will do all that is possible so that the Trieste problem, as well as all problems that might arise, will be solved justly and with fraternal spirit (...)<sup>46</sup>

Here we see the attempt of the speaker to emphasize the collaboration between Italian and Yugoslav antifascists, through a claim of common suffering under Fascism. We also see that the international issue of Trieste is evoked as a potentially problematic one that could threaten the solidarity between the Italian and the Yugoslav people.<sup>47</sup>

In a number of statements at the first AFŽ and the first UDI conferences, Italian delegates wish to underline that they are “sincere antifascists”, particularly when speaking to the representatives of countries that had been invaded by Fascist troops. During the first UDI congress in October 1945, after the intervention of the Albanian

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1951), which was revised and re-edited in 1978 (Ravera 1978). She was later named life senator, a position she held until her death in 1988.

45 Ada Gobetti, Consiglio Nazionale dell’UDI, 13-14 gennaio 1946, in Archivio Centrale UDI, Rome, fondo cronologico, B7 fascicolo 89.

46 “Noi che rappresentiamo le donne italiane vogliamo dirvi che il popolo italiano e le donne italiane sono sinceramente antifascisti: noi che abbiamo vissuto l’esperienza dolorosa del fascismo per un’intera generazione e ne abbiamo subito le conseguenze più disastrose sentiamo la profonda esigenza che un simile regime di reazione, di imperialismo non risorga mai più. (...) Vi garantiamo quindi che noi, donne italiane, come farete voi, donne jugoslave, faremo tutto il possibile, perché il problema di Trieste, come tutti i problemi che dovessero sorgere, venga risolto secondo giustizia e con spirito fraterno (...)” Jole Lombardi, 1 June 1945, I AFŽ Congress. Roma, Archivio Centrale UDI, fondo DnM, 45.3 A.

47 Another problematic issue was the one of Italian soldiers still detained in Yugoslavia in late 1945. They presented a petition to the UDI delegation in Belgrade, asking them to lobby for their release.

delegation, Marisa Rodano declared: "Italian women do not forget that Albania is a country that has suffered Fascist aggression. Fascism, not satisfied with having oppressed the Italian people and with having dragged them into an unjust and violent war, wanted to drag even the small Albanian people into war, though they, like the Italians didn't want the war."<sup>48</sup> UDI women attempt to speak not only for the antifascists, but also for "the Italian people", and thus to legitimate themselves as national actors, while attributing to this "people" antifascist feelings (the Italian word "popolo" can stand both for "the nation", Italy's inhabitants as well as for the "common people", the popular classes).<sup>49</sup> This shows how women's political participation in antifascist and internationalist organizations also had significant effects on the construction of national identities after 1945.<sup>50</sup>

At the same time, international encounters – but also the encounter with international politics at home – forced a number of women to reconsider the assumptions towards national and ethnic Others inherited from Fascism. Luciana Castellina recalls her encounter with politics during a nationalist student demonstration for the "italianità" of Trieste held in Rome in May 1945. Having grown up in a Triestine family, she joined the nationalist student demonstration, which later clashed with socialist and communist militants. After having escaped the violent clashes, she found herself in front of a group talking to the crowd about "the evildoings – I never knew about this – of Fascists towards the Slovenes, already in the 1920s (...) and then of the massacres during the occupation of Yugoslavia" (Castellina 2011: 127). Communist activists spoke of the need to "redeem" Italy through international solidarity with Yugoslavia. Luciana Castellina relates how she returned home from this encounter: "exhausted. And very upset. I remember that at home the Slovenes are called "schavi", that is, slaves. And that's how, more or less, they are treated, with contempt. I have never thought about these things" (Castellina 2011: 128). As I will show in the next sections, the idea that Italian antifascists have to "seek redemption" for Fascist crimes against the Slavic populations is far from uncommon in these years, and will play a great role in the battle for a Yugoslav Trieste.

48 "Le donne italiane non dimenticano che l'Albania è stato un paese aggredito dal fascismo il quale, non contento di opprimere e trascinare in una guerra ingiusta e violenta il popolo italiano, ha voluto trascinarvi anche il piccolo popolo albanese, che al pari del popolo italiano non voleva la guerra." Roma, Archivio Centrale UDI, fondo cronologico, B7 fascicolo 66.

49 This representation of the Italian "people" as antifascist became dominant during the postwar years, gradually silencing the violence of Fascist imperialism and the consensus it had among Italy's inhabitants, while attributing the responsibility for the war to Germany and Nazism alone. About the myth of "Italiani brava gente" [Italians good people], and about the silencing of Fascist crimes in postwar Italy, see Sassoon (2003) and Poggiolini (2002).

50 About internationalism and internationalization as a process that strengthens national identities, see Carlier (2010) and Zimmermann (2005). See also the conclusions of the present volume.

### 2.3. The ambivalence of the Yugoslav model for Italian militants

In this section I would like to explore other sources showing the importance of personal encounters between Italian and Yugoslav antifascist women in the postwar period, and notably the growing fascination of Italian antifascist militants with the neighboring socialist Yugoslav republic during the years 1945-1948. The various visits to Yugoslavia by Italian women affiliated to the UDI are to be considered within the framework of the gradual marginalization of leftist parties in Italy under anti-communist pressure, which compelled the Italian Communist Party to rely on a number of external sources of legitimation, such as the myth of the Soviet Union (Urban 1986). The comparison with the successful Yugoslav model next door was therefore inevitable, but it also contained a number of elements towards which Italian militants were ambivalent, as I will show in this section. These sources prove that transnational exchanges between antifascist forces in the two countries remained particularly intense in the postwar period, and that East-West connections were being established from the beginning of the Cold War.

For the first AFŽ congress in 1945, the Italian delegation was composed of women with different political orientations, in compliance with the national unity government: a socialist, Jole Lombardi, a woman from the Action party, Gabriella Ricci, a woman from the Left Christian Party, Maria Luisa Sacconi, and a communist, Maria Michetti. There is archival evidence that Maria Luisa Sacconi and Maria Michetti personally met with AFŽ leaders Vanda Novosel and Olga Kovačić during the congress. As mentioned earlier, another delegation from Trieste attended the conference in Belgrade, including Lina Morandotti from Monfalcone, Gigliola Destradi from Trieste, Carmen Perco from Lucinico, and other women whose full names are unknown. After this first encounter, UDI members gave a number of enthusiastic radio interviews about the ongoing reconstruction efforts in Yugoslavia.<sup>51</sup> They were particularly impressed with the government support to AFŽ activities, a support that was “lacking” in Italy. The only critical note was towards the “devotion” to Tito, which “can seem unconceivable, or at least exaggerated, to a superficial observer.” But, they added, “even if democracy has a different appearance from how we conceive it in the West, there’s a new spirit in the air” characterized by the common desire to reconstruct the country.<sup>52</sup>

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51 Interventions by Jole Lombardi and Gabriella Ricci, *Trasmissione Radio*, 7th of July 1945, in *Arhiv Jugoslavije*, Beograd, *Fond Antifašistički Front Žena Jugoslavije (1942-1953)* 141-24-18; Interventions by Maria Luisa Sacconi and Maria Michetti, *Trasmissione per “L’Italia Risorge”*, 25th of July 1945, in *Arhiv Jugoslavije*, Beograd, *Fond Antifašistički Front Žena Jugoslavije (1942-1953)* 141-24-22.

52 *Ibidem*.

A trace of this 1945 encounter – and of the sudden postwar political changes – can be found in a letter from Maria Michetti<sup>53</sup> to Vanda Novosel<sup>54</sup> in February 1947.<sup>55</sup> The letter, written one and a half years after the visit to Belgrade, describes the gradual dismantling of the initial antifascist unity, and the political diversity of women's antifascist positions. Michetti writes that of the four Italian women who visited the Congress, Maria Luisa Sacconi and Gabriella Ricci have abandoned politics and the “feminine movement”, while another, Jole Lombardi, has sided with the right-wing fraction of the socialists led by Saragat, and “is more and more anticommunist”. Michetti herself was still working within the PCI. She had joined the commission for female labor, and female youth.<sup>56</sup> Towards the end of the letter, Maria Michetti recalls the lasting impression that the trip to Yugoslavia had made on her:

Dear Vanda, I could not help but write to you, so deep is the memory that I have of your country, of your people and of all of you, male and female Yugoslav comrades. Perhaps you cannot understand how many things I have learned from your experience, which is nevertheless so different from ours; but I am sure that this is what keeps me so connected to you, to your work and to your country.<sup>57</sup>

Beyond representative declarations, this letter makes evident that strong intersubjective relationships and friendships could emerge between women of different countries, as a result of the transnational connections established through bilateral meetings and in international settings.<sup>58</sup> It is also a sign of antifascist women's enthusiastic engagement in postwar politics, and of their faith in the possibility of social transformation.

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53 Maria Michetti (1922-2007), communist militant since 1942, took part in the antifascist Resistance in Rome. She was one of the founders of the UDI and the leader of the Feminine Commission of the PCI in the Rome section after the war. From 1954 until 1987, she worked as a sociologist in La Sapienza university in Rome. She has been the editor of a number of volumes on the history of the women's movement in Italy, among which an anthology of documents about the history of the UDI, edited with Luciana Viviani and Marcherita Repetto (see Michetti, Viviani and Repetto 1998).

54 Vanda Novosel has been a member of the student communist youth (SKOJ) before the war, and an editor of the Zagreb women's journal *Ženski Svijet*. During the war she joined the Liberation Movement, becoming a leader of the Croatian AFŽ and a member of the Central Committee of the Yugoslav AFŽ.

55 Letter dated 22 February 1947, in Arhiv Jugoslavije, Beograd, Fond Antifašistički Front Žena Jugoslavije (1942-1953) 141-24-35.

56 Ibidem.

57 “Cara Vanda, non ho saputo fare a meno di scriverti tanto profondo è il ricordo che ho del vostro Paese, del vostro popolo e di tutti voi, compagni e compagne Jugoslave. Forse tu non puoi comprendere quante cose io abbia imparato dalla vostra esperienza, che pure è tanto diversa dalla nostra, ma io sono sicura che è questo, il fatto di aver imparato tanto da voi, che mi tiene così legata a voi, al vostro lavoro e al vostro Paese.” Ibidem.

58 About intersubjective relations and friendships within the framework of the Women's International Democratic Federation, see De Haan (2010b). About the concept of *intersubjectivity* and its relevance for women's history, see Passerini (1991, 1996).

Two other examples show the great significance of the Yugoslav revolutionary model for Italian militants. Pina Palumbo and Luciana Viviani expressed very positive feelings after having attended the second AFŽ congress in January 1948. The powerful revolutionary imagery that the Yugoslav Resistance could evoke among Italian militants is evident in the letter sent by Pina Palumbo, from the National Directive Committee of the UDI, to the AFŽ Central Committee in February 1948. Palumbo stated:

We, Italian women, have a lot to learn from you [Yugoslav women], because despite the great sacrifices of our glorious partisan struggle, Fascism, internal capitalism and American imperialism still dominate our Country. So, with your example, we must work and strenuously fight in order for this to end forever.<sup>59</sup>

While Italian antifascist women had fought in the Resistance like their Yugoslav comrades had, this effort hadn't resulted like it had in Yugoslavia in a socialist revolution. As historians have noted, in the late 1940s many rank-and-file communist militants were disappointed with postwar Italian politics, and with the strategy of moderation chosen by the leadership of the PCI. Like Palumbo and Viviani, many communist militants resented the fact "fascism, internal capitalism and American imperialism" still dominated Italy.

Blaženka Mimica, the AFŽ representative at the second 1947 UDI Congress, noted a similar frustration among Italian communist militants in Milan. Among other observations about political life in Italy, Mimica spoke of her visit to the metallurgical factory of the Magneti Marelli. A woman working in the factory told the Yugoslav delegation that her son had died in the Partisans, and indicated his picture, which had been placed by the workers on the factory wall. The mother of the fallen partisan said: "He died to get the kind of life you have. We do not have it, but we will fight for it." Before she left, Blaženka Mimica received a letter from the same woman. After having expressed her pleasure at the Yugoslav visit, the woman lamented the fact that in Italy many comrades were still falling for their ideals, while Fascists were rising again. She wondered, "how much more pain, how much suffering is needed to finally become free like you are in your lucky country. Please give our greetings to all the female comrades in Yugoslavia. We, Italian female workers, share their ideal: peace and freedom."<sup>60</sup>

59 "Noi donne italiane abbiamo molto da imparare da Voi, perché malgrado i sacrifici della nostra gloriosa lotta partigiana, il fascismo, il capitalismo interno e l'imperialismo americano, dominano ancora nel nostro Paese, perciò noi dobbiamo col vostro esempio lavorare e lottare strenuamente perché tutto ciò finisca per sempre." Pina Palumbo, comitato direttivo nazionale UDI, fac-simile no. 9, page 96, in *Le Front Antifasciste des Femmes de Yougoslavie au sein du Mouvement International des Femmes*, 1951, IISG archive, Amsterdam.

60 "U toj fabrici sreli smo majku čiji je sin poginuo u partizanima. Pokazala nam je njegovu sliku koju su radnici istakli u fabrici i rekla: 'On je pao za takav život kakav vi imate. Mi ga nemamo, ali – borićemo se.' Od te žene dobila sam, poslije mog odlaska iz Italije pismo u kojem kaže: 'Dan kad je delegacija Jugoslavije bila u našoj fabrici ostaće za mene trajan i nezaboravan. Mogu ti reći da mnogi naši drugovi padaju i danas pod zrnem fašista koji nastoje da se ponovo podignu, a im još moramo krvlju napatati naše ulice da im to ne dozvolimo. Koliko još boli,

The Yugoslav context constituted an explicit point of reference for Italian militants, notably after 1947 and the ousting of the Italian Communist Party from the antifascist unity government. While in Italy conservatism and reactionism seemed to prevail, in Yugoslavia the construction of socialism was well on its way. During the 1948 AFŽ congress, Luciana Viviani and Pina Palumbo argued in a speech that in Italy democracy was only “formal”, while Trieste, according to Laura Weiss, was “colonized” by Americans.<sup>61</sup> As a result of this utopian image of Yugoslavia, many Italian workers and former partisans migrated across side of the border between 1946 and 1947 (Bonelli 1994; Giuseppini 2008).

At the same time, while it was a point of reference for Italian militants, the superiority of the Yugoslav model also had ambivalences. Proud of their revolutionary successes, Yugoslav leaders admonished their Italian comrades for not having followed a revolutionary path, and for having accepted bourgeois democracy within the framework of the national unity government. They reproached the PCI for not aligning themselves explicitly enough with the socialist camp and against the capitalist camp. When the PCI was finally ousted from the national government in 1947, it seemed to prove that Togliatti’s line of “progressive democracy” had failed. During the first meeting of the Cominform in September 1947, therefore, “Edvard Kardelj criticized the PCI for its wartime acceptance of party parity in the CLNS [National Liberation Committee], for not trying to seize power at the end of the war, for failing to secure key ministries in the Italian government, for excessive observance of parliamentary rules, and for eschewing the “two-camp” line” (Terzuolo 1985: 221).

The great pride and the sense of superiority displayed by the Yugoslav delegations would generate a lot of resentment among militants active in Italy. Marisa Rodano recalled during our interview that during the first WIDF congress in Paris, Yugoslav women appeared “loaded with medals”. She associated Yugoslav women’s 1945 display of pride with Yugoslav communists subsequently condemning, in 1947, the Italian Communist Party, “for not having accomplished a revolution, while they [the Yugoslavs] had!”<sup>62</sup> A similar superior attitude was remembered by Vinka Kitarović, who in her interview recalled how, upon her return to Yugoslavia, her resistance struggle in Italy was not taken seriously, since it did not seem possible to put the two resistance movements on the same level.<sup>63</sup>

In time, the Yugoslav revolutionary model would become problematic for Italian militants since it proved unfeasible in their own country. Italy, in fact, had been

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koliko je patnji potrebno da budemo zaista slobodni kao sto ste vi u vašoj sretnoj domovini. Pozdravi sve drugarice u Jugoslaviji s kojima nas, italijanske radnice, veze isti ideal: mir i sloboda.” Published in *Žena Danas*, n. 51, nov-dec 1947. Državni Arhiv, Zagreb, HR-HDA-KDAŽ -1234-147.

61 Interventions by Luciana Viviani, Pina Palumbo and Laura Weiss (wrongly transcribed as Luiza Weiss), II AFŽ Congress minutes, in Arhiv Jugoslavije, Beograd, Fond Antifašistički Front Žena Jugoslavije (1942-1953) 141-2-683 ; 141-2-906 ; 141-2-908.

62 Interview with Marisa Rodano, 16th of December 2009.

63 Interview with Vinka Kitarović, 6th of April 2011.

assigned to the Western sphere of influence during the Yalta conference.<sup>64</sup> These tensions between the Italian and the Yugoslav communist parties over the correct political line to adopt led to conflict in the Italo-Yugoslav border area (Karlsen 2010), and particularly in the struggle for the contested city of Trieste (see next section). They will become even more explicit after the expulsion of Yugoslavia from Cominform in 1948, as I will show in Chapter 5.

### 3. The Italo-Yugoslav border area as a microcosm of Cold War battles

After having highlighted the international activities of the UDI and the AFŽ within the framework of the Women's International Democratic Federation, I'd like to focus in this section on antifascist women's organizations in the Italo-Yugoslav border area, notably the Union of Italian and Slovene women (UDAIŠ – ASIŽŽ) in Trieste. As mentioned earlier in this chapter, the conflict over the definition of Italo-Yugoslav borders in the Second World War aftermath soon became a battle for the redefinition of Western and Soviet spheres of influence in Southern and South-Eastern Europe. Between 1945 and 1954, therefore, Trieste becomes a "microcosm" of Cold War ideological and national struggles (Valdevit 1986). I will not go here into detailed discussions of Cold War international and national political actors, which have been extensively covered by different scholars (Karlsen 2010; Novak 1970; Terzuolo 1986).

What is important to note here is that the contested settlement of national borders has produced prevailing "national-patriotic historiographies" and divided memories on both the Italian and the Slovenian sides (Verginella 2006); moreover, these readings have been further complicated by the ideological anti-communist shift of 1989, and by the coupling of nationalist and anti-communist labels in revisionist discourses (the widespread usage of the label "Slavo-communist" in contemporary Italian right-wing publications being the most evident example).<sup>65</sup>

At the same time, the post-Cold War context and the increase in transnational scholarly exchanges opened up possibilities for cross-border critical dialogues among historians.<sup>66</sup> Journals and scholarly publications have started to focus on the social

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64 For a reconstruction of the relationship between the Italian Communist Party and Moscow, see Pons (2001). Pons refers to the fact that the Yugoslavs exerted pressure on the PCI for a more radical position at the beginning of 1948, while the Soviet Union excluded the possibility of a Communist insurrection (2001: 20-21).

65 The stories of communist men and women in the Julian Region – and notably in Trieste – have largely been interpreted within this framework, underlying Moscow's control over the Italian Communist Party at the expense of national interests, but also emphasized "Slavic betrayal" of Italian antifascists (Di Gianantonio 2006) as well as the crimes committed by Yugoslav partisans at Italy's Oriental border. See footnote 30, chapter 1. Similar debates about partisan killings of collaborationist and nationalist forces in 1945 took place in post-Yugoslav successor states in the 1990s. See Verginella (2006).

66 A notable example of cross-border cooperation among historians is the work of a commission of Italian and Slovenian historians (*Commissione mista storico-culturale italo-slovena*), which worked from 1993 until 2000 to produce a joint historical report on the Italo-Slovenian



and cultural production of “divided memories” in the multi-ethnic, multi-lingual Julian Region, and on the effects of these divisions on the everyday lives of its inhabitants (Di Gianantonio 2006; Gombač 2007; Verginella 2006). Historians have recently started to deal with the importance of gender divisions in the border area, in connection with pressing ethnic, national and ideological divisions (Sluga 2001 and 1994). Some initial reconstructions of women’s lives and women’s forms of political participation in the border area have also been published (Troha 2007; Rossi et al. 2004; Di Gianantonio 2007).

In this section I propose to contribute to these discussions from the perspective of a gender studies scholar, focusing on how competing ideological and political discourses were gendered, as well as on the way in which local internationalist women’s organizations played a significant – and highly political – role in Cold War disputes. At the same time, I aim to situate women’s organizations in the Italo-Yugoslav border area within the larger framework of the relation between antifascist and left-wing women’s organizations in Italy and Yugoslavia, looking in particular at the connections and interactions between the Union of Italian and Slovene women (UDAIS/ASIŽZ) of Trieste, the Union of Italian Women in Italy (UDI), the Antifascist Women’s Front in Yugoslavia (AFŽ), and the Women’s International Democratic Federation (WIDF).

Through this transnational framework, I hope to show that discourses of Fascism and antifascism in Trieste, and of communism and anticommunism, were part of larger divides that crossed Europe during and after the Second World War. While I do not wish to undermine the importance of post-Cold War studies of communist violence in the region (see notably Ballinger 2003), I am also wary of an exclusive focus on communist violence, which obscures the long-standing consequences of Fascism and of Nazi-fascist warfare in the Italo-Yugoslav border area. Without keeping in mind the local effects of Fascist violence and of the Second World War as a European total war, it is difficult to understand the importance of communist and socialist utopias for the antifascist generation living at the Italo-Yugoslav border, and notably the fascination with the Yugoslav model of “people’s democracy” for the Slovene and working class Italian inhabitants of Trieste (see Sluga 2001). In the next sections women’s organizing in the contested city of Trieste will be addressed in detail.

### 3.1. For a Yugoslav Trieste: the Union of Italo-Slovene Antifascist Women (UDAIS)

The city of Trieste was liberated from Nazi-fascist forces by the Yugoslav partisan army, who managed to enter the city before the New Zealand Allied troops, on the

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border area, in order to create a shared memory of historical events related to the border area. The report (2000), however, was scarcely diffused in Italy and Slovenia. The Italian version of the report is available here: [http://www.storicamente.org/01\\_fonti/archivio\\_2-2006.htm](http://www.storicamente.org/01_fonti/archivio_2-2006.htm) (last accessed 22.4.2012).

1st of May 1945. This action corresponded to the wish of the communist Yugoslav government to secure the position of the city within the Yugoslav Federation, in the hope that the military annexation would also guarantee a political transfer of Trieste to Yugoslavia. Forty days later, nonetheless, the Yugoslav troops were forced to leave after a series of negotiations with the Allied troops. The border region was divided into the area surrounding Trieste, placed under Allied Military Government, and the area to the South of Trieste, including part of Istria, assigned to Yugoslav control (these later became zone A and B of the Free Territory of Trieste or TLT). See Novak (1970) and Karlsen (2010).

Because of its Slovene population and because of its strategic position on the Adriatic Sea, the city of Trieste assumed a mythical status for the Slovene liberation forces.<sup>67</sup> The inclusion of Trieste within the Yugoslav Federation was seen as a gesture of national liberation from the previous Italian Fascist oppressor, so that even politically moderate Slovenes joined the Liberation Front for patriotic reasons. At the same time, the majority of the local working class Italian population welcomed the idea of a socialist “popular government” under Yugoslavia.<sup>68</sup> Since 1945, the local Italian and Slovene communist party sections were, in fact, joined and replaced by the PCRG or KPJK, the Communist Party of the Julian Region. In 1945 the Trieste communist party section declared itself in favour of the annexation of Trieste to Yugoslavia, even though some local members did not agree. During the war, the leadership of the Italian Communist Party had tried to negotiate with the Yugoslav leaders in an attempt to counter the Yugoslav unilateral decision to annex Trieste. Nevertheless, the PCI could not counter the hegemony of Yugoslav communists in the border area (Terzuolo 1985; Karlsen 2010).

It is in this context, that the Union of Antifascist Italo-Slovene Women (UDAIS/ASIŽZ)<sup>69</sup> was founded in the summer of 1945. This mixed organization was founded after the UAIS, the Antifascist Italo-Slovene Union, and after the Sindacati Unici, the Unified Trade Union, two “front” organizations linked to the Communist Party of the Julian Region, which included the Italian and Slovene workers and activists. These organizations were supposed to implement the politics of brotherhood and unity among different nationalities in the Julian Region, that is brotherhood and unity among Italian and Slovene inhabitants. The politics of brotherhood had already come into being during the antifascist Resistance, in which Italian and Slovene antifascist activists had fought together under Yugoslav command in the Julian Region.

According to Glenda Sluga (2001: 71-72) “(...) brotherhood became the most distinctive feature of memories of the Liberation Front and its political meaningful-

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67 About the importance of Trieste for the Slovene population and for Slovene communists, see Verginella (2007); Godeša (2007); Troha (2006).

68 See Sluga (2001); Troha (2006) and (2007).

69 Throughout the thesis I make use of the Italian acronym of the organization, which was the most commonly used in local publications. The Slovenian acronym, ASIŽZ or SIAŽZ (*Antifašistične Slovensko-Italijanske Ženske Zveze*) was rarely used in Trieste. When referring to the organization Slovene militants used most often the earlier formula of “AFŽ Trst” (Antifascist Women’s Front of Trieste).

ness. During the war Italo-Slovene brotherhood entailed, and allowed, redefinition of what it meant to be Slovene (i.e., being able or choosing to speak the Slovene language in public), and Italian (i.e., being able to identify as Italian and antifascist). It also appealed to women (...).” The politics of Italo-Slovene brotherhood were indeed very important to redefine national and gendered identities, but I would argue that we need a more nuanced and critical assessment of their outcomes. These political practices were generally implemented in a top-down manner, and contained implicit hierarchical assumptions about national feelings and belongings, with Italian national sentiments being identified as negative and reactionary, and Slovene national sentiments being identified as progressive and righteous, thus portraying the solution of a Yugoslav Trieste as the only acceptable one.

In August 1945, a first unified meeting took place between Slovene and Italian militants previously affiliated to the AFŽ, the Antifascist Women’s Front of the Trieste region, and the DAT, Antifascist Triestine Women.<sup>70</sup> In the Trieste area, antifascist women’s organizing during the war and immediate postwar years followed the Yugoslav model of the Antifascist Women’s Front, and the Trieste activists had no contact with the Union of Italian Women until 1945.<sup>71</sup> Although they supported the Yugoslav agenda until 1948, the leaders of the UDAIS were affiliated to the Women’s International Democratic Federation as an independent organization, since they were formally part of an independent territory, the Free Territory of Trieste.

The UDAIS existed not only in Trieste but also in the rest of the Julian Region under Allied Administration, notably in the cities of Gorizia and Monfalcone. According to Nevenka Troha (2007), this organization had 3150 members in Gorizia in June 1946, and 19.700 members in the area between Trieste and Monfalcone in June 1946. In March 1948, it had 45.000 members in total. The organization’s main aim was to mobilize women in favor of Trieste becoming the Seventh Republic of the socialist Yugoslav Federation. This was notably the case during the visit of the Inter-Allied Commission in 1946, which had to decide upon the fate of the Italo-Yugoslav border settlement. At the same time, in order to gain consensus among women, the organization had to address their needs and interests, and to demonstrate that their everyday lives would be better under a socialist regime. The organization, therefore, combined “feminine work” (assistance to women and children, festivities, commemorations, economic mobilizations against high prices etc.) with political agitation and propaganda about local and global politics.

The minutes of the meetings of the UDAIS accordingly show not only how Cold War discourses in Trieste were gendered and ethnicized, but also how women themselves were conscious producers of political and ideological discourses in the imme-

70 Trieste, 23 Agosto 1945, Verbale della prima riunione del comitato cittadino unificato delle donne antifasciste triestine, in NSK Trieste, fond ASIŽZ-UDAIŠ, box UDI-ZŽI.

71 This is also reflected in the location of the archival sources. Most of the UDAIS documents, even those in Italian, are, in fact, located in the Slovenian National Archive in Ljubljana, or in the Slovene Library in Trieste, even though Italian and Italo-phone women were part of the organization. The material about the UDAIS in Ljubljana and Trieste is classified quite loosely, but I will attempt to provide the most detailed archival information in this section.

diate postwar period, contributing to the emerging Cold War divide. The battle for the transformation of Trieste into the Seventh Yugoslav Republic was placed within the general global struggle between capitalist imperialism and socialist progressive democracy. I will give here some examples of the discourses concerning international politics that were circulating within the UDAIS meetings and congresses.

During a UDAIS Central Committee Meeting in Monfalcone in October 1945, for instance,

[c]omrade Romea gives a political overview showing how Europe today is divided in two Democracies: 1) Popular Democracy, coming from the East, illuminating all the Balkans with a new light, with peace and work and reconstruction, giving land to the peasants and raising the wages of the workers (...); 2) Imperialist Democracy coming from the West, which has a number of consequences in our Region, of which we can see some examples: strikes, lay-offs, higher prices, a life that is not very satisfactory for the popular masses.<sup>72</sup>

Italy and Yugoslavia are positioned very differently in this struggle between progressive and reactionary forces worldwide. According to UDAIS leaders, “the Italian reaction is the avant-garde of international reaction, while Yugoslavia is the advanced point of Progressive Democracy that has been established in the East.” The Julian Region is the “meeting point” of these forces, and is at the center of the “ruthless war” between the forces of “progress, which want the further advancement of Democracy, and the forces of Regress, who want to maintain their position.”<sup>73</sup> As explained in another meeting by UDAIS leader Marija Bernetić<sup>74</sup>:

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72 “La compagna Romea da uno sguardo politico illustrando come al giorno d’oggi l’Europa si è divisa in due Democrazie. 1°) Democrazia Popolare, che viene da Oriente illuminando tutti i balcani con una nuova luce, pace e lavoro, e ricostruzione, dando le terre ai contadini e aumentando i salari degli operai, adeguando così la paga settimanale con il sistema di vita. 2°) Democrazia Imperialistica che viene da Occidente, che porta pure delle conseguenze nella nostra Regione dal fatto che abbiamo pure degli esempi, scioperi sospensioni aumento di prezzi, una vita non molto soddisfacente per la massa popolare.” Comitato Centrale DAIS Monfalcone, 10.10.45, Ljubljana, AS 1576, Glavni Odbor Slovansko-italijanske antifašistične ženske zveze, box 1, folder 11A.

73 “L’affermazione della vera Democrazia nella nuova Jugoslavia ha smascherato e disarmato completamente la propaganda reazionaria, ed oggi possiamo dire che, come la reazione italiana è l’avanguardia della reazione internazionale così la Jugoslavia è la punta avanzata della Democrazia Progressista che si è affermata in Oriente. Nella Regione Giulia punto d’incontro di queste forze si assiste alla guerra accanità che essi si combattano (sic), quelle del progresso vogliono l’Ulteriore avanzata della Democrazia, quelle del Regresso vogliono mantenere le proprie posizioni.” UDAIS Monfalcone, 17.12.45. Ljubljana, AS 1576, Glavni Odbor Slovansko-italijanske antifašistične ženske zveze, box 1, folder 1, Glavni odbor AFŽ Trst.

74 Marija Bernetić (1902-1993), was born in Trieste in a working class Slovenian family. Since her early youth she took part in anti-war demonstrations and in the strikes that followed World War I. In 1921 she adhered to the Communist Party of Italy and she became a party organizer among women and the youth. From 1927 she was repeatedly arrested by the Fascist authorities, until she went into exile in France in 1933. For years she maintained antifascist networks

The reactionaries don't want to give Trieste to Yugoslavia since they know that it would mean giving it to Russia. Trieste within the Yugoslav state would have an amazing future; it would become the harbor of the whole of central Europe. But through its harbor not only trade would come out, but also the progressive democratic idea that would expand everywhere, first of all in Italy itself, where, given the hard economic conditions, it would find a fertile terrain.<sup>75</sup>

To annex Trieste to Italy, a "defeated nation", would, according to UDAIS militants, be an injustice towards the Slovene population, since "this Slovene nation has fought for four years, as the only democratic base of the (Italian) empire."<sup>76</sup> It would mean "the continuation of the injustices suffered for over 25 years by the two peoples, Italian and Slovene, with disastrous consequences and with the loss of the rights which these two peoples in this land have already gained."<sup>77</sup> By "rights" they mean the institutions of "popular power" established by the Yugoslav partisans during the forty days of administration of the city.

The establishment of the Free Territory of Trieste in 1946 is described by UDAIS militants as an imperialist maneuver, and the Allied Military Government on the zone A of the territory as a dangerous imperialist colony in the Adriatic. A brochure published for the Women's Day of 1947 states that the AMG "treats our population in the same way that Anglo-American imperialism is accustomed to consider and treat the colonial population."<sup>78</sup> Triestine antifascists, therefore, cannot but wish for the

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between Italy and France, and in 1939 she was arrested and tortured, and imprisoned until September 1943, when she managed to return to Trieste. She joined the partisans first in Trieste and then in Slovenia. In 1945 she was among the leaders of the PCRG and a founder of UDAIS. She took part in WIDF conferences in Prague, Budapest and Moscow between 1946 and 1949.

75 "La reazione vuole creare qui uno stato cuscinetto che sarebbe altrettanto, se non più pericoloso della nostra annessione all'Italia. La reazione non vuole dare Trieste alla Jugoslavia perché sa che significa darla alla Russia. Trieste incorporata nello stato jugoslavo avrebbe un avvenire grandioso, diventerebbe il porto per tutta l'Europa centrale. Ma attraverso il suo porto non uscirebbe solo il traffico mercantile, ma pure l'idea democratica progressista che si espanderebbe ovunque, ma in primo luogo in Italia stessa, ove date le sue condizioni economiche difficili, troverebbe terreno fertile. Questo soprattutto teme la reazione e vuole impedire ad ogni costo." Riunione DAIS 27.08.45. NSK Trieste, fond ASIZZ-UDAI, box 2, folder "Poročila Sej".

76 "L'Italia è un paese vinto! (...) Sarebbe una somma ingiustizia far pagare a questo popolo sloveno il peso delle avventure fasciste nel mentre come giustamente disse il nostro compagno Kardelj, questa nazione slovena, ha combattuto per quattro anni, come l'unica base democratica dell'impero (italiano)." Riunione UDAIS 18.05.45. NSK Trieste, fond ASIZZ-UDAI, box 2, folder "Poročila Sej".

77 "L'annessione di queste terre all'Italia significherebbe dunque la continuazione delle ingiustizie sopportate per oltre un quarto di secolo dai due popoli italiano e sloveno con conseguenze disastrose per tutti e due e con la perdita di diritti, che questi due popoli su questa terra li hanno già conseguiti." (sic) Commissione di Lavoro DAIS Trieste, 2.09.45. NSK Trieste, fond ASIZZ-UDAI, box 2, folder "Poročila Sej".

78 Il Governo Militare Alleato "tratta la nostra popolazione come l'imperialismo anglo-americano è abituato a considerare e trattare le popolazioni coloniali", opuscolo "Alle donne del territorio libero di Trieste", p.14. Trieste, Istituto Saranz, fondo Marija Bernetić, Busta 2 "Questione

inclusion of Trieste within the socialist camp, rather than keeping the city in Italy, a reactionary country that has lost the war: “With Trieste as Seventh Autonomous State, we’ll adhere to Yugoslavia, not to become Slovenes, but to be truly Italian, finally free; and our victory will weaken the reactionary forces of the world, making it possible for the democratic forces, especially the Italian ones, to follow us on the road of justice and freedom.”<sup>79</sup> Here the idea that Italian antifascist forces should learn from the Yugoslav experience, and that so far they haven’t managed to follow the right revolutionary path emerges again. In the UDAIS documents, Italian women are described as more “backward”, and invited to take Slovene women as an example, since they are more “experienced” in the revolutionary struggle.

While Yugoslav national demands are portrayed as a legitimate compensation for their suffering under fascism, and are equated with the advancement of socialism, Italian national feelings are by definition reactionary. In another 1946 document, we read:

[T]he national feeling expressed today by the Slavic peoples cannot be classified as a chauvinistic feeling. Rather, it expresses the attachment of those peoples to the fruits of their revolution, to the new world that has emerged from the sacrifices and the effort of millions of people. Oppositely, the nationalism coming from the Italian side must be condemned. It is a damaging feeling, since it leads the people to defend a world that is long gone.<sup>80</sup>

The Italian Resistance is recognized, but only as subordinated, and as faulty in its lack of radicalism: “Fascism has been defeated in Italy through the people’s participation in the liberation struggle, but the fight had not been fought decisively enough to bring the people into power. This, instead, had happened here [in Trieste] and in Yugoslavia it is already a bright reality.”<sup>81</sup>

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femminile”. For an analysis of the diaries of AMG chiefs and of their views on the local political situation, see Sluga (2002).

79 Noi con Trieste 7° Stato Autonomo, aderiremo alla Jugoslavia, non per diventare sloveni, ma per essere italiani veri; finalmente liberi; e con la vittoria nostra indebolirà le forze reazionarie del mondo, dando così la possibilità a tutte quelle democratiche e specialmente quelle italiane di seguirci sulla via della giustizia e della libertà.” Riunione UDAIS 5.11.45. Ljubljana, AS 1576, Glavni Odbor Slovansko-italijanske antifašistične ženske zveze, box 1, folder 11A.

80 “(...) il sentimento nazionale che oggi manifestano i popoli slavi non può esser classificato quale sentimento sciovinista. Esso esprime null’altro che l’attaccamento di questi popoli ai frutti della loro rivoluzione, a quel mondo nuovo che è sorto dai sacrifici e dalla volontà di milioni di persone. All’opposto il nazionalismo da parte italiana deve esser condannato quale sentimento dannoso perché porta il popolo a difendere un mondo ormai tramontato.” NSK Trieste, box AFŽ – ZSZ – DAT, third folder, “Programma che dovrà servire nelle riunioni per preparare le donne per il congresso regionale”, no date (probably 1946).

81 “Se il fascismo è stato abbattuto in Italia con il concorso del popolo nella lotta di liberazione, dall’altro canto questa lotta non è stata condotta tanto decisamente da portare il popolo al potere, ciò che invece qui da noi era già avvenuto e in Jugoslavia è ora luminosa realtà.” *Ibidem*.

These examples demonstrate the importance of UDAIS mobilizations within the contest for a Yugoslav, socialist Trieste. In the case of the Italo-Yugoslav border area, women's organizations were directly engaged in the production of Cold War communist discourses and imageries, which opposed Eastern popular democracies to Western imperialist democracies. A women's organization like the UDAIS played an active role in the reproduction of everyday Cold War discourses at the local level. In the next section I will consider the way in which these discourses about the superiority of the socialist system were gendered, and how discourses about women's emancipation were formulated in postwar Trieste.

### 3.2. "Let's learn how to talk": women's class-based activism in a multi-ethnic city

Unlike it did for the UDI and the AFŽ, the issue of international politics dominated the agenda of the UDAIS from 1945 onwards. At the same time, UDAIS leaders also had the task of raising an interest in politics among the "base" of peasant and working-class women, and of reaching them by showing how they could benefit from political activism. Meanwhile, socialist discourses about women's emancipation and women's political rights circulated between Trieste, Rome and Belgrade, notably the discourse of social motherhood and women's rights, portrayed as a special achievement of socialist "people's democracies", but at the same time as a universal democratic development that could interest Italy as well.

Furthermore, in Trieste the idea of women's emancipation is coupled with the idea of social justice and multi-ethnic tolerance and coexistence, giving rise to demands for gender, class and ethnic equality. The multi-ethnic character of the city is reflected in Trieste's most important communist female leaders, two very different and remarkable women: Marija Bernetić (1902-1993), a Slovene militant of working class background, who had been involved in revolutionary activities in France and Italy in the 1920s and 1930s, and Laura Weiss (1914-1987), an upper class Jewish doctor, who became involved in the communist party during the Resistance.<sup>82</sup> They often participated in WIDF conferences as UDAIS representatives, and played a very important role in Cold War intra-communist battles after 1948 (see next chapter). Already

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<sup>82</sup> Laura Weiss (1933-1989) was part of the Trieste Jewish bourgeoisie, and had been persecuted with her family since the Italian Fascist Race Laws of 1938. After the war she was involved in the Trieste communist party and in trade unionism, together with her father Ernesto, a natural scientist and teacher. Trained as a medical doctor, Laura Weiss strongly engaged in social work and in struggles for women's emancipation and antiracism. In 1949 she was elected as communist party representative for the local council, and became a prominent figure in foreign politics, representing the *Partito Comunista del Territorio Libero di Trieste* (Communist Party of the Free Territory of Trieste, PCTLT) at different international meetings. She was also part of UDAIS, and in 1949 was elected in the WIDF Council. Close to party boss Vittorio Vidali, she became his partner and after his death she was the curator of his personal archive. See Andri et al, 2007.

as a director of the UDAIS journal "Donne", Laura Weiss shows her engagement with women's rights, but also against racism and anti-Semitism.<sup>83</sup>

Communist female leaders were assigned "work among women" by the party in order to win over women's consensus (see Chapter 3 and Chapter 6); in the 1945 reports of UDAIS meetings in the different localities of zone A, we read some reflections on the need for the organization to be less "political", and to abandon the underground, clandestine attitude used during the Resistance, in order to open itself to the masses. The lack of skilled activists was a problem, as it was in the AFŽ and the UDI at the time. Another major difficulty was the fact that Slovene and Italian female militants had to work together; within the UDAIS internal reports there are a number of remarks about the difficulty with which the Slovene and Italian militants abandoned "sectarianism" and implemented real "brotherhood". Moreover, the UDAIS needed to overcome the mistrust of the local population, suspicious as it was of authoritarian organizational forms experienced under Fascism. In a report from November 1945, we read that "[t]he female workers are wary of the organizations because they had bad experiences under Fascism, where they were forced to participate like puppets. They do not yet understand the difference between the Fascist regime and our organizations."<sup>84</sup>

Already in October 1945, it became clear that "...it is no longer possible to interest and keep the women active only with the political issues, they want something more today: they want to learn."<sup>85</sup> The UDAIS leaders realized that women's everyday lives could not be improved only by focusing on international politics, but that they had to take into account women's basic needs. In 1945 Trieste, wartime destruction, political uncertainty and the stationing of foreign troops had contributed to cause a number of urgent problems: high food and accommodation prices, the widespread migration of local inhabitants and women's prostitution, notably among war widows (Nemec 2006). The crossing of racial and class boundaries through prostitution generated moral anxieties among the local population.<sup>86</sup>

Having interiorized the idea of women's equality through their experiences in the antifascist Resistance, the most active militants gradually developed some forms of gender-solidarity with the working class and peasant women they tried to reach.

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83 In order to reconstruct the activities of the UDAIS, I have worked on the Weiss and Bernetić personal collections at the Istituto Livio Saranz in Trieste. As mentioned earlier, most of the minutes of UDAIS meetings are held in the Ljubljana state archives and in the Slovenian library of Trieste.

84 "Le operaie si tengono discoste dalle organizzazioni perché hanno avuto brutte esperienze col fascismo, ove erano obbligate di parteciparvi come marionette. Non comprendono ancora la differenza fra il regime fascista e le nostre organizzazioni." Commissione di Lavoro DAIS Trieste, 2.09.45. NSK Trieste, fond ASIŽZ-UDAIŠ, box 2, folder "Poročila Sej".

85 "Si constata che non è più possibile interessare e tenere attivate le donne con le sole questioni politiche. Esse oggi vogliono qualcosa di più, vogliono istruirsi." Resoconto colloquio con le responsabili di Fiume, 2.10.45. NSK Trieste, folder UDI-ZŽI.

86 In a local DAIS report from the village of Selz (written by a male militant), women are reproached to prefer rich men and "all the races of soldiers" to the honest worker or the people's hero who has no money or job. Ljubljana. AS 1576. Glavni Odbor Slovansko-italijanske antifašistične ženske zveze. Box 1, folder 11A.



They were aware of the problems that needed to be addressed, such as “those of mothers and children, accommodation, prostitution, abortion, etc.” (Note that the issue of abortion is explicitly mentioned here, while this was not the case for the rest of Italy in 1945).<sup>87</sup> As in the case of the UDI and the AFŽ, addressing “feminine” topics could allow the left to gain a broader consensus among women. For this, they decided to gather documents and brochures from the women’s organizations in Belgrade, Milan and Rome, in order to study them and thus be able to address the issues that most interest women.<sup>88</sup> Even if expressed in a top-down manner, therefore, these discourses were progressive at the time, and were attempting to respond to the demands of the base.

During a political meeting in the harbor city of Monfalcone in January 1946, a militant noted: “what can be observed among women and even among the working class inhabitants of the suburbs is that there is a great need to learn and become educated.”<sup>89</sup> The lack of suitable cadres, however, made it difficult to meet this need. It was acknowledged that if a greater number of women who could “speak, write, and organize” much more could be accomplished. Of course, the issue of education cannot be disconnected from the issue of socialist agitation. In another undated DAIS report, we read that in order not to allow reactionary elements to rule the people, women have to be aware of everyday politics, read newspapers and brochures, follow conferences, so that “little by little you will all become activists, all conference-makers, in the streets and in the squares, wherever you will hear people talking against our democracy.”<sup>90</sup>

The Soviet and the Yugoslav model of women’s equality were evoked as something that could be applied within the local context too, if Trieste became the Seventh Yugoslav Republic. The emancipation of women was described as a crucial mean to preparing the advent of a future socialist society: “Tomorrow, when the people will have the power, we will need women who are good workers, good technicians, who

87 Resoconto colloquio con le responsabili di Fiume, 2.10.45. NSK Trieste, folder UDI-zŽ1.

88 Ibidem.

89 “Si osserva tra le donne e persino tra le popolane dei sobborghi della città un grande bisogno d'apprendere e d'istruirsi; esse leggono con grande interesse i giornali e con grande interesse partecipano pure alle riunioni. Esse stesse riconoscono che si potrebbe fare molto di più se si avessero maggiori quadri, se si avesse cioè un maggior numero di donne capaci di parlare, di scrivere, d'organizzare.” DAIS Monfalcone, 4.1.46, report 6.1.46, Ljubljana, AS 1576, Glavni Odbor Slovansko-italijanske antifašistične ženske zveze. Box 2, folder 2 A.

90 “Di questo le donne dovranno essere ben sicure per non permettere che altri elementi reazionari vadano al potere e come prima ci amministrino, ecco la necessità di coltivarci, d'essere al corrente dei fatti giornalieri, e questo attraverso la lettura dei giornali, degli opuscoli che voi troverete sempre nelle nostre biblioteche, attraverso le riunioni, le conferenze tenute dai nostri compagni i quali ampiamente vi illustrano l'attuale situazione in modo che voi saprete rispondere a tutte le voci emmesse dai reazionari e così un po' alla volta diverrete tutte attiviste, tutte conferenziere e questo nelle strade, nelle piazze, dovunque sentirete parlare contro la nostra democrazia.” Document “Necessità della collaborazione della donna nella lotta politica”, no date, Ljubljana, AS 1576, Glavni Odbor Slovansko-italijanske antifašistične ženske zveze. Box 2, folder 2 A.

know how to work as journalists, who are good surgeons and engineers; this means that we should get them interested in these things already today.”<sup>91</sup>

As was the case for the UDI and the AFŽ in the immediate postwar period (see chapter 3), discourses about social motherhood and welfare had an important part in discussions about socialism. During a meeting in the harbor city of Monfalcone in January 1946, the benefits of the welfare provisions in the new Yugoslav Constitution were explained to the local women, highlighting how working mothers would continue to receive their salary three months before and three months after giving birth. “The comrade says that in the countries where there is a popular government, and a regime of healthy democracy, the woman does not have to worry any longer about becoming a mother, but she can wait, serene and calm, tasting the joy of her motherhood, because she knows that at the right moment she and her child will be taken care of.”<sup>92</sup>

As in UDI and AFŽ documents and speeches, the idea of *social motherhood*, that is, motherhood as a social phenomenon that is protected by the state (see chapter 3), coexisted with the idea that women should get an education and should be equal to men in the public sphere. The protection of women’s roles as wives and mothers in the private sphere was coupled with women’s equal political and social rights in the public sphere (right to vote, equal pay for equal work etc.), in formulations similar to those of the AFŽ and UDI on these issues. Women’s emancipation was thus defined as follows: “With emancipation we do not mean to make the woman the rival of the man, or his competitor, but rather to make her a free, conscious individual, active in the family life, in the social life as well as in the life of the state.” An emancipated woman was thus “a conscious mother, a companion of the man and not an eternal minor.”<sup>93</sup>

We can perceive in this definition the long-standing anxiety of women’s socialist organizations to distance themselves from liberal feminism. At the same time, certain articles in UDAIS’ magazine *Donne* [Women] – directed at the time by Laura Weiss – are extraordinarily progressive not only in terms of gender relations, but also in terms

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91 “Domani, quando il popolo sarà al potere, noi avremo bisogno di donne che siano brave operaie, brave tecniche, che sappiano fare del giornalismo, che siano chirurghe e ingegneri e a queste cose noi dobbiamo interessarle già ora” (*sic*). NSK Trieste, resoconto colloquio con le responsabili di Fiume, 2.10.45

92 “La compagna dice che nei paesi dove ci sono i poteri popolari, dove c’è un regime di sana democrazia la donna non ha più quella preoccupazione che provava nel momento in cui sarebbe dovuta madre ma bensì può attendere serena e calma gustando tutta la gioia della sua maternità perché sa che al momento opportuno ci sarà chi penserà a lei e al suo bambino.” DAIS Monfalcone, meeting 4.1.46, report 6.1.46, Ljubljana, AS 1576, Glavni Odbor Slovansko-italijanske antifašistične ženske zveze. Box 2, folder 2 A. Note that this argument is very similar to the one advanced by Vida Tomšić during the first AFŽ Congress, see Chapter 3.

93 “Con emancipazione noi non intendiamo far della donna una rivale dell’uomo, oppure una sua concorrente, bensì di renderla individuo libero, cosciente, attivo nella vita familiare, nella vita sociale come in quella dello Stato. La donna deve divenire innanzitutto madre cosciente dei suoi compiti, compagna dell’uomo e non eterna minorenne (...)” SK Trieste, box AFŽ – ZSZ – DAT, third folder, “Programma che dovrà servire nelle riunioni per preparare le donne per il congresso regionale”, no date (probably 1946).

of class and ethnic divisions. The magazine – modeled after the Slovenian women's journal *Nasa Žena* – was published from May 1946 to the spring of 1948. It contained political articles on WIDF, UDI and AFŽ congresses, but did not make any explicit reference to Trieste as Seventh Yugoslav Republic. Most of the pages were dedicated to women's everyday lives and to entertainment, with news reports and colorful illustrations about cinema and art, fashion tips, recipes, sewing models, and practical suggestions on how to raise children and decorate the house. It also contained extraordinarily progressive pages about women's bodily hygiene, and some instructions on physical exercise.

A 1947 editorial piece by Laura Weiss deserves to be quoted at length, since it highlights the way in which demands for women's equality resonated with antiracist and socialist demands, finally creating an extraordinary manifesto against all forms of essentialism. The editorial is titled "Impariamo a parlare" ("Let's learn how to talk"). I translate here an extensive part of Weiss's editorial:

Have you ever heard someone saying: "he's a southerner, but a real gentleman", "he's a Slav but such a good person", "he's a worker, but seems very well educated", "she's a peasant but very refined", "he's a Jew but very generous". Do you feel that this "but" is used in the right way? Does it not attribute something very despicable in the adjectives indicating the nationality, the social class, the religion of a person?

I am persuaded that this "but", dear friends, is terribly offensive. Without noticing, with the best intentions in the world, we lose in this way the confidence, the trust and the friendship of those surrounding us!

As women perhaps we all felt more or less irritated by the usual phrase, "despite being a woman, she's really good", as if women were by definition inferior! Even worse when words that are used to indicate nationality, social class, sex, race, religion, are identified with their traditionally – and unjust – demeaning significance: Italian for fascist, Slavic for stubborn, Jewish for stingy, black and colored to mean inferior, peasant for ignorant, street sweeper for miserable, etc. All this expresses a very unjust prejudice. (...)

Let's see if we can demonstrate for once that a stereotype, partly positive, corresponds to the truth; people say that women are more sensitive than men; let's demonstrate then that we know how to use this sensitivity here, when we have to fight not against thoughts, but against the evil words that divide us.<sup>94</sup>

This editorial is remarkable for a number of reasons. With a relatively accessible style, and without lecturing the readers, it tackles gender, racial and class prejudice all together, showing that these prejudices are already included in the labels that are used to indicate difference and otherness. While deconstructing women's inferiority, the editorial targets the racism against Southerners, Slavs and Jews, as well as class prejudice towards workers and peasants. It also demarcates the definition of "Italian" from fascism, and criticizes race prejudices against black and colored people. Later in the

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94 Laura Weiss, "Impariamo a parlare", in Donne, August 1947. A collection of the UDAIS journal *Donne* is available at Istituto Livio Saranz, Trieste.

article, essentialist, racist words are described as “small atomic bombs” which destroy harmony and coexistence. As a talented politician, and as a dedicated doctor, Laura Weiss would play an important role in Trieste local politics, and in women’s organizing in the city (see Pacor 1991; see also Chapter 7). She would also take an active role in international politics and in the activities of the Women’s International Democratic Federation. While adhering to the communist party with conviction, she maintained her antiracist<sup>95</sup> and anti-imperialist sensitivity, as well as her critical stance towards the bureaucratic decision-making of the communist leadership, notably during the de-Stalinization process (see Chapter 7).

The stories of extraordinary antifascist women like Laura Weiss deserve to be rediscovered.<sup>96</sup> In the early Cold War period, antifascist female leaders of women’s organizations were crucial in fostering the circulation of progressive ideas and images in the Italo-Yugoslav border area. Women’s access to education and to politics is enhanced through the publications of journals such as *Donne*. While instructing women about world culture and politics, and while responding to women’s everyday needs, essentialist ideas about women’s inferiority, as well as anti-Semitism, racism and class inequalities were denounced as backward and conservative. As Laura Weiss editorial and by number of articles in the journal *Donne* show, the UDAIS contributed to diffusing the internationalist ideal of women’s emancipation across Cold War borders, together with demands for social justice and multi-ethnic coexistence.

## Conclusion

This chapter dealt with the transnational activities of the UDI, the AFŽ, the UDAIS and the Women’s International Democratic Federation in the period between the end of Second World War and the beginning of 1948. In it I have demonstrated that women were active participants in Cold War political struggles and divides. I have shown that women’s political engagements depended on a number of local, national and international factors, with important differences between the leadership and the rank-and-file members. The story of women’s transnational activism in the Cold War period, and of the Women’s International Democratic Federation, has been largely forgotten after 1989.

In order to reconstruct a number of stories about women’s activism during the Cold War that had been largely silenced, I have translated and analyzed a variety of multilingual sources in this chapter, documenting multilateral and bilateral encounters across borders. These sources include transnational correspondence between Italian and Yu-

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95 Thirty years after this editorial, in 1979, Weiss proposed an amendment the PCI Statute, which declared that all citizens above 18 years old who accept the party program, “independently of race, religious faith, and philosophical convictions” could be members of the communist party. She proposed to eliminate the word “race”, a term “that is scientifically nonexistent or at least extremely equivocal when it comes to those belonging to the human species.” (Andri et al. 2007: 36).

96 About notable female figures in the post-1945 Italo-Yugoslav border area, see also the case of Ondina Peteani, Di Gianantonio (2007).

Yugoslav women's organizations, and between these organizations and the WIDF, as well as internal reports, and the minutes of the UDI, the AFŽ and the WIDF congresses. I have also described the different stances of Italian and Yugoslav delegations at WIDF congresses after 1945. While Italian delegates had to "redeem" the name of their nation, dissociating it from Fascism, Yugoslav delegates were glorified as the model to be followed, since they had established a socialist republic at the end of a successful Resistance struggle.

In this chapter, moreover, I have introduced the case of postwar Trieste, a contested city situated at the crossroads of the forthcoming East-West divide, and in which the divided ideological and national legacies of the Second World War intersected with new Cold War conflicts. The case of the Union of Italo-Slovene Antifascist Women (UDAIŠ) illustrates the gendered character of socialist discourses. In their campaigns for turning Trieste into the Seventh Yugoslav Republic (*Settima Federativa*), local female militants directly mobilized a utopian imagery equating socialism with women's emancipation and welfare rights. UDAIŠ militants became active promoters of the Soviet and Yugoslav "dreamworld" in Trieste, claiming that women's equal rights, including women's "social motherhood", constituted an integral part of socialist "people's democracies". In the focus on the case study of Trieste, I have pointed once again at the differences between leaders and rank-and-file militants in political organizing.

I have highlighted the mutual influences between local, national and international settings, as well as the interrelations between the UDI, the AFŽ, the UDAIŠ and the WIDF in this chapter. In so doing, I have demonstrated that women's antifascist organizations provided an important connection between East and West in the early Cold War period. Progressive ideas about women's emancipation circulated across the Italo-Yugoslav border and across Cold War borders, together with utopian images of revolution and social justice. Even though they were part of overall Cold War narratives about the superiority of the socialist bloc, the Resolutions approved by the WIDF in the years 1945-1947 were crucial in promoting women's equal rights in the different countries affiliated to the Federation, as well as in supporting civil rights movements and processes of decolonization in other parts of the world. The 1945 *Resolution on the economic, juridical and social situation of women* and the 1947 Resolutions on women in colonized countries and on Black women in the United States attest to the fact that in the late 1940s antifascist women's organizations developed a multi-level, sophisticated critique of gender, race and class power relations. The article "Let's learn how to talk" written by UDAIŠ leader Laura Weiss equally indicates a deep awareness of gender, race, and class prejudices, and a deep commitment to realizing a more just society.

In this chapter I have shown that while women's organizations such as the UDI, the AFŽ, and the UDAIŠ were crucial in promoting women's rights in the postwar period, they maintained the hierarchical, top-down structure that was characteristic of the "democratic centralism" of the communist left during the Cold War period. This hierarchical top-down structure was strengthened with the increase in ideological polarizations in the late 1940s. In the next chapters, I will consider the impact of growing Cold War tensions on women's internationalist organizations in Italy and Yugoslavia, notably the wide-ranging impact of the 1948 Cominform Resolution excluding Yugoslavia from the socialist bloc.

## Chapter 5

### From comrades to traitors: the Cominform Resolution of 1948

#### Introduction

On the island, our minds had to be “enlightened” at all costs (...) They kept lecturing us, reading us articles talking of the evil doings of Stalin, of concentration camps, of ethnic cleansing. Before [the Soviet-Yugoslav split], even thinking about that would have been forbidden, since it would have been taken as a sign of hostility and treason. In short, we, the militants, had been mere clay, excluded from all information, and used by the leadership as they pleased.  
(Eva Grlić 2005: 165)

In 1997, Eva Grlić, a woman who was unknown as a public figure, and “who had spent most of her life in the shadow of her more famous husband, Croatian philosopher Danko Grlić” (Lukić 2004: 175), published her autobiography with the simple title *Sjećanja* (Remembrances). The book, an outstanding personal and familial narrative intertwined with twentieth century history, was translated in Italian in 2005. Eva Grlić (1920–2008) was born Eva Izrael in Budapest. Her mother was from a Hungarian Ashkenazi Jewish family while her father was a Sephardi Bosnian. After the fall of the Hungarian Republic, she moved with her parents, sympathizers of Bela Kun, to Split and later to Sarajevo, her father’s the native city. A left-wing sympathizer, Eva was expelled from her high school in 1937 for exchanging letters with her boyfriend, who had joined the International Brigades in Spain. In 1938 Eva and her family moved to Zagreb, where she got a job a secretary in a textile factory and became involved in trade unions and revolutionary movements. She married and gave birth to a daughter, Vesna. In 1941 with the onset of the war, the Ustasha forces immediately killed her husband and her father, whom they targeted as political opponents (Lukić 2004: 182).

During the war, Eva lost her parents, her husband, her grandmother and many other relatives in the Holocaust. She managed to survive by joining the partisans, and after the war she found herself alone with her small daughter. While working as a journalist on the editing board of the journal *Naprijed*, she met Danko Grlić<sup>1</sup>, her second husband. But their postwar family life was cut short by another major political event: the expulsion of Yugoslavia from the socialist bloc, and the wave of arbitrary

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1 Danko Grlić (1923–1984), journalist and philosopher, became one of the founders of the journal *Praxis* in 1965. About the vicissitudes of the Praxis group, see Sher (1977).

political repression which followed. Both Eva and her husband were sent to the infamous prison camp Goli Otok, (the 'Naked Island'), Danko for a few months and Eva for two years, between the end of 1950 and the beginning of 1953 (Grlić 2005: 153-173). Eva Grlić's story is one of the few accounts by a woman about post-1948 political repression and about Goli Otok (Jambrešić-Kirin 2009; Lukić 2004).

In this chapter I will analyse the consequences of the Soviet-Yugoslav split of 1948-1949 on Italian, Yugoslav and Italo-Slovene women's organizations at the national, international and local levels. Following the Cominform Resolution, which expelled the Yugoslav Communist Party from the socialist bloc, the Women's International Democratic Federation (WIDF) excluded the representatives of the Antifascist Women's Front of Yugoslavia (AFŽ). As a result, the Union of Italian Women (UDI) suspended its bilateral relations with the AFŽ, as did all the other national branches of the Federation. The Cominform Resolution, therefore, had major repercussions not only for women's organization in the Balkans, but also for the relationship between Italian and Yugoslav antifascist activists, as well as for activists living in the Italo-Yugoslav border area; because of the fierceness of ideological polarizations within the communist bloc, the fights have been equated by left-wing militants involved in it to a modern "war of religion"<sup>2</sup>, the consequences of which are still felt today, not only by those who lived through these events, but also in terms of the divided memories of Southern and South-Eastern Europe.

In the first section of this chapter I address the impact of the Soviet-Yugoslav split on the position of the Yugoslav delegation within the Women's International Democratic Federation, from the Resolution of June 1948 until the definitive expulsion from the Federation in the autumn of 1949. I analyze the transformations in the public discourse of Soviet leaders, and subsequently in that of the WIDF, which turned the previously acclaimed Yugoslav comrades into fascist collaborators and imperialist spies. Together with the Yugoslav authorities, AFŽ leaders at first strived to show that the decision was based on misinformation, and they continued to claim their identities as brave antifascist fighters and attempted to defend the prestige of the Yugoslav government. When the decision became irrevocable, however, they started to voice a more severe critique of WIDF undemocratic procedures, denouncing Soviet hegemony over less powerful countries.

In the second section of this chapter I deal with the issue of political repression, and notably with the Cold War construction of internal enemies within the Italian and Yugoslav communist parties and women's organizations. Yugoslav leaders engaged in a fierce political repression against internal "Cominformists" (i.e. those who allegedly sided with the Soviet Union and attempted to overthrow Tito's regime). I look at the experiences of women detained in political prison camps, and notably in the infamous Goli Otok prison camp. I also deal with the experiences of Italian militants who had migrated to socialist Yugoslavia and were finally arrested as "Cominformists" and sent to Goli Otok. On the basis of archival sources, I discuss the issue of AFŽ leaders' complicity in the ongoing political repression, and ordinary militants' fear and indif-

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2 See for instance the interview of Julij Beltram, transcription contained in Archivio Bonelli, IRSMI Trieste.

ference towards sudden geopolitical changes. I also deal with the discursive and moral shaming of so-called “Titoists” within the ranks of the Italian Communist Party, and with the role of the Union of Italian Women in producing Cold War divides.

In the last part of the second section I return to the context of the Italo-Yugoslav border area, and look at the dramatic impact of the 1948 Resolution on the leftist forces in Trieste, and in particular on the UDAIS (*Unione Donne Antifasciste Italo-Slovene*), the multi-ethnic women’s organization federating progressive Italian and Slovene women. As a consequence of the Resolution, the UDAIS split up into the pro-Cominform UDD (*Unione Donne Democratiche*) and the feminine section of pro-Yugoslav USI (*Unione Socialisti Indipendenti*). Moreover, in Trieste these intra-communist “wars of religion” were entangled with nationalist discourses related to the conflict over the definition of the Italo-Yugoslav border, and over the contested status of the city. This highlights once again the specificity of the border area – but also the entanglement of international, national and local geopolitical factors.

As in the previous chapter, my aim is to show that women took a significant part in Cold War struggles, and were active producers of Cold War discourses between East and West, to the point of complicity in processes of ‘othering’ and ideological enemy-making. The leaders of the AFŽ, the UDI and the UDAIS took sides that were not necessarily determined by their gendered position, but rather by their political affiliation, their leadership position, and/or by their national and ethnic identities. The fact that in the midst of Cold War struggles, UDI and AFŽ leaders chose to side with their respective communist parties – and thus against each other – doesn’t deprive its members of political agency but rather highlights the complexity of antifascist women’s political loyalties in the postwar period. It also shows the effects of Cold War polarizations on the internationalist, antifascist “sisterhood” expressed by the Women’s International Democratic Federation, and highlights the non-homogeneity and the shifting character of left-wing women’s political identities and subjectivities in Cold War Europe.

## **1. The Soviet-Yugoslav split and its consequences on women’s internationalism**

### **1.1. The First and Second Cominform Resolutions (June 1948 – November 1949)**

The First Cominform<sup>3</sup> Resolution of the 28th of June 1948 – expelling Yugoslavia from the socialist bloc for “nationalist deviation” – marked the beginning of the Soviet-Yugoslav conflict, and had a number of consequences for the rest of the Soviet satellite

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3 The Cominform (Communist Information Bureau, called *Informbiro* in Yugoslavia) was founded in 1947, after the announcement by the United States of the Marshall Plan. The network was composed of the Communist parties of Bulgaria, Czechoslovakia, France, Hungary, Italy, Poland, Romania, the Soviet Union, and Yugoslavia. Seen as the replacement of previous Comintern (or Third International, the communist coordination organ founded in 1919 and dissolved during World War II), the Cominform lasted until 1956. It was dissolved during the de-Stalinization process in 1956.



states. It was not until the 29th of November 1949, however, with the publication of the Second Cominform Resolution (significantly entitled “The Communist Party of Yugoslavia in the Power of Assassins and Spies”) that the break between Yugoslavia and the Soviet Union was definitive. Between June 1948 and November 1949 the Yugoslavs were still hoping to disprove Cominform accusations and to be readmitted to the socialist camp. From the autumn of 1949 onwards, however, the Yugoslav elite started to turn towards the West to overcome the economic blockade and political isolation. This period of uncertainty between the First and Second Resolution had important effects on women’s international encounters, as I will show in the next sections. Let us briefly recall here some historical elements that shed light on the historical significance of the 1948 and 1949 Resolutions, before analyzing its effects on women’s organizations in Italy and Yugoslavia.

The Soviet-Yugoslav split, the first rift in the Soviet bloc after World War Two, has been the object of extensive studies on the part of Cold War scholars<sup>4</sup>; it has also been at the center of relevant memoirs by Yugoslav communist leaders, notably Milovan Đilas (1962) and Edvard Kardelj (1982). This split seemed particularly surprising since, as described earlier, in the immediate aftermath of World War II Yugoslavia appeared as a dutiful follower of Soviet policies, which included agrarian reform and five-year industrialization plans. The Yugoslav Communist Party even had a leading role in the first Cominform meeting.<sup>5</sup> A number of divergences with Moscow, however, had already started to emerge during the war, when the Yugoslav partisans waged a revolutionary class struggle alongside the war of liberation; they resisted Stalin’s appeals for moderation after the Yalta agreement (see Banac 1988). It must be remembered that the Yugoslav communists’ seizure of power was the only one that derived its legitimacy from a successful Resistance movement, rather than from Red Army support<sup>6</sup>, a posi-

4 See notably Banac (1988); Bass and Marbury (1959); Ulam (1952); Vucinich (1982).

5 As mentioned in Chapter 1, at the first autumn 1947 Cominform session in Poland, the Yugoslavs pronounced their infamous critique of the French and Italian communist parties’ reformism. In his *Reminiscences*, Kardelj (1982: 101) writes that he and Đilas formulated their critiques of the Italian and French Communist Parties upon the suggestion of the Soviets, and that Stalin plotted this in order to better isolate Yugoslavia later. This retrospectively apologetic view is denied by Perović (2007), who argues that until early 1948 there was no evident sign of conflict. Both Kardelj (1982) and Đilas (1962) offer a teleological narrative of progressive misunderstandings between Soviet and Yugoslav leaders in their memoirs, and downplay the Yugoslav leaders’ radicalism and pro-Soviet stance in the period that preceded the Cominform Resolution.

6 Milovan Đilas’ memoirs recall that since the war, Yugoslavia had been critical of the war rapes committed by Red Army soldiers in the Northeastern corner of Yugoslavia. When Đilas met Stalin in person shortly before the rift, Stalin allegedly legitimated the rapes with the following argument: “Well then, imagine a man who has fought from Stalingrad to Belgrade – over thousands of kilometers of his own devastated land, across the dead bodies of his comrades and dearest ones! How can such a man react normally? And what is so awful in his amusing himself with a woman, after such horrors?” (Đilas 1962: 102) Stalin criticized Yugoslavia for imagining the Red Army to be ideal: “One has to understand the soldier. The Red Army is not ideal. The important thing is that it fights Germans – and it is fighting them well; the rest doesn’t matter”

tion different from other communist elites in Eastern Europe (with the partial exception of Czechoslovakia, where the communist party received considerable popular support in the first free elections). In the postwar era, the presence of Soviet experts and diplomats in Yugoslavia caused frictions; in their industrialization plans and land reform projects, moreover, the Yugoslav government refused to blindly apply Soviet-style collectivization and anti-kulak measures to a population that was largely constituted of peasants.<sup>7</sup>

International politics were also a matter of controversy between Stalin and Tito, notably in relation to the Anglo-American Allies. After 1945, Yugoslavia insisted on supporting the Greek communists in the Greek civil war, and on annexing the city of Trieste, while Stalin was more intent on pleasing the Allies and respecting the division of territories as agreed in Yalta. Another matter of disagreement was Yugoslav independent foreign policies in the Balkans, notably their attempt to incorporate Albania in the Yugoslav Federation. Yugoslavia also established economic and political agreements with Bulgaria, in view of a possible Balkan Federation – a project that was supported by Bulgarian communist leader Georgi Dimitrov. Stalin, therefore, was wary of Tito's relative autonomy from Moscow, and saw what he perceived as the excessively radical attitude of the Yugoslav communists as a potential threat to relations with the Western Allies.

Recent studies of USSR archives (Perović 2007) have substantially confirmed the main motives behind the conflict: Yugoslavia's excessive independence from Moscow on internal and external matters, and notably diverging views on the issue of Trieste and on the Greek Civil War, as well as Yugoslavia's attempt to become a regional force in the Balkans, are all cited as reasons for the split. Other recent studies have highlighted the perspective of the United States on this rift. In August 1946, the Yugoslavs shot down a US Military plane, killing the four officers on board, and the United States defined the country as a "rat hole to be watched" (Mehta 2005). After the Soviet-Yugoslav split, however, Yugoslavia gradually became a possible Western ally. United States officials attempted to profit from this first fissure in the communist camp, and to "keep Tito afloat" (Lees 1997). In time, the split with the Soviet Union came to determine Yugoslavia's unique geopolitical position between the two Blocs, and its foreign politics of Non-Alignment.

If most historical Cold War studies of the Soviet-Yugoslav split focus on political leaders' decision-making, few investigate the impact of this major historical and political event on the everyday lives of thousands of communist militants and sympathizers living in Yugoslavia, Italy and in the Italo-Yugoslav border area. Even fewer studies consider the role of women and of women's organizations within this conflict.<sup>8</sup>

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(Đilas 1962: 102).

<sup>7</sup> See Bokovoy (1998).

<sup>8</sup> Sluga's study (2001) of Cold War Trieste, although integrating a gendered perspective and looking at women's organizations, does not address the effects of the Cominform resolution in the Free Territory of Trieste. Terzuolo, in his study (1985) of the relations between the Italian and Yugoslav Communist Parties, dedicates one chapter to the effect of the Cominform Campaign on the PCI and on the Trieste region in general, but does not refer to women's organiza-

Although I will refer to existing studies for the overall historical framework, my aim here is to show how the Cominform Resolution affected international and national women's organizations, and how, in turn, these organizations participated in the ongoing Cold War ideological struggles. Feminist scholars have focused on the way in which gendered bodies and allegoric female figures served as key discursive devices to re-signify ideological and ethnic boundaries during the Second World War and the Cold War aftermath (Duchen and Bandhauer-Schoffmann 2000: 3; Sluga 1994, 2001). On the other hand, as Helen Laville points out, the focus on gendered representations should also be accompanied by a reflection on women's role as active participants in international relations (Laville 2002: 5).

When dealing with the effects of the Cominform Resolution, I was confronted with omissions, silences and selective memories. The difficult issues of women's victimization and of women's complicity with discursive and material violence represent a "grey zone" that is difficult to uncover (Jambrešić-Kirin 2009). Increasing Cold War polarizations seriously reduced the margins of autonomy of women's organizations, which became "embedded" in the ongoing ideological conflicts within the communist bloc. To a certain extent, some female communists contributed to a climate of fear and to the political repression of internal enemies. At the same time, many women, and particularly female antifascist militants, were the victims of repressive politics and of Cold War divides.<sup>9</sup>

The archival sources of the AFŽ, the UDI and the UDAIS of this period are greatly shaped by Cold War discourses and propaganda. In order to look critically at the forms of exclusion and political repression enacted by women's organizations, I make use of a number of other sources which provide a more balanced view on this period, and allow me to challenge Cold War constructions of internal and external enemies. I rely notably on autobiographical writings – such as those by historian Gerda Lerner, former partisan Eva Grlić and communist militant Alfredo Bonelli – as well as on other recent scholarly works that have started to untangle the silence that surrounds women's experiences of Cold War intra-communist conflicts (Jambrešić-Kirin 2009).

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tions. Banac (1988) has traced in detail the emergence of different communist factions in Yugoslavia, and yet his study mostly focuses on political leaders and male militants. Scotti (1991) has retraced the destiny of Italian communists who sided with Stalin in 1948 and were deported to Goli Otok, but the experience of female inmates and of wives and relatives of prisoners is left in the shadow.

<sup>9</sup> As noted by Jambrešić-Kirin (2009), the conditions experienced in the concentration camps for political prisoners such as Goli Otok created a "grey zone" in which forms of complicity and victimization were blurred, since fellow inmates had to reciprocally "re-educate" each other through punishment, so that no one could leave the camp without feeling both guilty and fearful.

## 1.2. The isolation of Yugoslav delegates at the Women's International Exhibition

As mentioned in chapter 4, the Antifascist Women's Front of Yugoslavia had a prominent role in the 1945 WIDF founding Congress in Paris, and its achievements were repeatedly described in the WIDF Bulletin, *Femmes du Monde Entier*. In November 1947, only a few months before the Resolution, the WIDF Council decided that the next WIDF Congress would be held in Belgrade, a sign that the Yugoslav branch was still held in high esteem. The Yugoslav delegates participated in an Executive Council meeting held in Rome in May 1948.

As shown in the previous chapter, the Yugoslav model of national liberation and revolutionary seizure of power – as the only neighbouring Soviet-style “people’s democracy” – was especially important to Italian leftists after 1945. The idea that Italian militants could learn from the Yugoslav model was still prominent in the spring of 1948, when the Union of Italian Women started to organize summer excursions to Yugoslavia for ninety women from the “base” (“factory workers, peasants, teachers, clerks”). The travelers were supposed to be carefully selected by their local UDI section, and to engage in “useful and widespread propaganda work” once they returned to Italy.<sup>10</sup> On their side, AFŽ leaders were keen to present themselves as successful followers of Soviet-style emancipation.<sup>11</sup> But these summer trips to Yugoslavia, planned for Italian women for July 1948, never took place. On July the 9<sup>th</sup>, the UDI secretariat in Rome informed the Belgrade AFŽ headquarters that the trip was cancelled since they had not obtained the necessary visas. The bilateral relationship between the UDI and the AFŽ would not be resumed until 1955.

On the 28<sup>th</sup> of June 1948<sup>12</sup>, after a tense exchange of correspondence between Yugoslav and Soviet leaders which had lasted all spring (see Bass and Marbury 1959), the Cominform announced that the “Central Committee of the Communist Party of Yugoslavia has placed itself and the Yugoslav Party outside the family of the fraternal Communist Parties, outside the united Communist front and consequently outside

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10 Each UDI section was asked to elect the “representatives of a factory, or of an agricultural firm [...] worthy of the highest trust from all the workers, for their morality and their merits.” Letter of June 1948 by Baldina di Vittorio, Rome, Archivio Centrale UDI, fondo DnM 48.3, 6.

11 The Belgrade Secretariat recommended that each Republic take the foreign delegation to the “better collectives, where women are working and have greatly improved their qualifications within the factory.” They summoned each Republic to show “(...) the progress of our women up until today, as shock workers, innovators, rationalizers and so on.” “Zapisnik sa sastanka CO AFŽ sa rukovodiocima propagandne sekcije i kulturno prosvjetnih otseka Glavnih Odbora AFŽ”, 10 June 1948. Zagreb, Državni Arhiv, AFŽ-KDAŽ-HR-HDA 1234-5-k.58 “Sjednice, Plenumi, Sastanci, 1946-1959”, 298.

12 The 28th of June, or *Vidovdan* (St.Vitus day) is a highly symbolic date in the history of Yugoslavia, being notably the date of the 1389 Kosovo Polje battle fought by Serbia against the Ottomans, as well as the day of the assassination of archduke Franz Ferdinand and of his wife Sofia in Sarajevo in 1914. The first Constitution of the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes, was promulgated on the 28th of June 1921.

the ranks of the Information Bureau.” There were multiple charges against the Yugoslav communist leadership in the Resolution. They were accused of dispensing “a deviationist domestic and foreign policy (...) [which] determined hostility toward the Soviet Union (...)”, and also, notably, of implementing a faulty agricultural policy (treating the peasantry as a single entity instead of looking at class differences).<sup>13</sup> The Yugoslav Communist Party was also accused of not being democratic internally, of refusing to accept criticism, and of “arrogant behavior toward fraternal parties and claims to privilege” (Bass and Marbury 1959: 40).

At the end of the Resolution, the Information Bureau invited the “healthy elements” within the party to “compel their present leaders to recognize their mistakes openly and honestly and to rectify them; to break with nationalism, return to internationalism, and to consolidate in every way the united socialist front against imperialism.” This seemed to leave some space for correction of party policies. However, the Resolution concluded, “should the present leaders of the Yugoslav Communist Party prove incapable of doing this, they ought to be replaced and a new internationalist leadership of the Party ought to be advanced. The Information Bureau does not doubt that the Communist Party of Yugoslavia will be able to fulfill this honorable task” (Bass and Marbury 1959: 46).

The Cominform Resolution caused an immense shock wave within the socialist camp, creating confusion and disbelief among rank-and-file militants in Yugoslavia, but also in Italy and the Italo-Yugoslav border area. The Resolution had an immediate impact not only on the relationship between the Yugoslav Communist Party and the other communist parties belonging to the Information Bureau, but also on the relationship between the AFŽ and the WIDF. On the 28<sup>th</sup> of June when the Resolution was published, the Women’s International Democratic Federation was holding an ambitious Women’s International Exhibition at Porte de Versailles in Paris, inaugurated on the 12 June. According to Yugoslav reports the exhibition had more than a hundred thousand visitors, mostly the “working masses” and intellectuals. An article in *Donne* reports:

From 42 Nations, thousands of boxes of all dimensions have arrived on the shores of the Seine. They contain craftworks, artworks, photographs and documents of all that comes out of female hands, under all climates and all latitudes of the earth. Most of all, these are documents about the common struggle waged by the women

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13 “On the question of the leading role of the working class, the leaders of the Yugoslav Communist Party, by affirming that the peasantry is the “most stable foundation of the Yugoslav state”, are departing from the Marxist-Leninist path and are taking the path of a populist, kulak party.” (Bass and Marbury 1959: 42) According to Bokovoy, this allegation of faulty agrarian policy had the purpose to “strike maliciously at the very heart of the Yugoslav revolutionary experience – the Communists’ relationship with the peasants.” Bokovoy continues: (...) “The КРЈ owed its rise to power to the alliance forged between the party and the peasantry, which still constituted a large part of the party’s membership in 1948. Throughout 1948, Stalin and the Cominform would challenge the unnatural liaison between peasant and Communist in order to force the КРЈ leaders to admit their mistakes and divide the party over this sin” (1998: 85-86).

of the whole world, for peace, brotherhood, protection of childhood, emancipation of women, cultural elevation, amelioration of social and economic conditions of all the peoples. We can truly say that this exhibition is the exhibition of universal friendship.<sup>14</sup>

The Soviet pavilion was “the most spectacular”, and the image of Stalin dominated the scene (Jeanneret 2002). The Yugoslav pavilion also stood out and was so successful that the Yugoslav staff had to point out to the visitors “how the Soviet stand was better, how there you could see thirty years of socialism, how it was more accurate, and so on.”<sup>15</sup> The AFŽ managed to obtain 165 square meters of exhibition space, and displayed artworks, folkloristic objects, publications, a statue of Marshal Tito, and a number of data on agricultural and industrial production in Yugoslavia since the end of the war. One of the central panels described women’s life in Yugoslavia and the rights achieved under socialism (social, economic and political equality, welfare services for children and mothers, equality in marriage). A special emphasis was placed on maternity leave regulations and on health provisions for mothers. Pictures portrayed women working the land, driving tractors, studying, teaching and doing sport, under slogans such as “The land belongs to those who cultivate it” and “Education and culture have become the property of the people.”<sup>16</sup> Yugoslavia’s prestige among French communists and leftist sympathizers is apparent from the comments left in the guestbook of the Yugoslav exhibition before the 28th of June. Many French women wrote messages of solidarity with Yugoslavia, as well as messages of admiration for Tito and for the successful realization of a socialist state. There were also messages of a more personal character, expressing strong solidarity and affection for Yugoslav women who had been fellow inmates in the Nazi concentration camps of Oranienburg and Ravensbruck.<sup>17</sup>

Yet, on the 28th of June, everything changed: the Cominform Resolution – published immediately by the French communist newspaper *l’Humanité* – accused the Yugoslav government of “nationalist deviation” and of favoring the “kulaks” in the countryside. In one of the (anonymous) reports written by the women in charge of the Yugoslav stand at the Paris exhibition, we get a sense of the sudden isolation that fell upon the Yugoslav representatives after the 28th of June. After the publication of the Resolution, she writes, they heard from the visitors “a million stupidities and insolences, which indicate the political level of their [the French] masses.” Visitors

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14 UDAIS magazine *Donne*, Trieste, July 1948 (Istituto Livio Saranz, Trieste).

15 “O međunarodnoj izložbi žena u Parizu”, Belgrade, Arhiv Jugoslavije, AFŽ fund, 141-21-420.

16 Belgrade, Arhiv Jugoslavije, AFŽ fund, 141-21-134 ; 135.

17 One woman, J., wrote “During this visit I have thought of my little Ivanka, so brave, whose soul was so upright and so beautiful, despite her youth she was the one who helped me to endure the long fatigues and the blows in Ravensbruck.” Another woman, named Thèrese, wrote: “While visiting this stand I thought a lot of you, my dear little comrades Sylvia – Sladka – Marinka with whom I have suffered so much in the Nazi camp of Oranienburg. I have a lot of admiration for the beautiful work of the Yugoslav people, glory to them and to their beloved Marshal Tito. Long Live Yugoslavia.” The guestbooks of the Yugoslav pavilions at the Paris exhibition are located in Belgrade, Arhiv Jugoslavije, AFŽ fund, 141, folder n. 21.

passing the stand accused Tito of being a “traitor”, a “bastard” and so on.<sup>18</sup> Many visitors, however, were sincerely curious and enquired after the true state of affairs. The Yugoslav staff tried to deny the accusations and defend the government, while also still showing admiration and respect for the Soviet Union. One French woman asked them if they really had betrayed the country to imperialists, but seemed to believe their explanations when they assured her that this was not the case; another woman who had travelled to Yugoslavia defended the work of the Yugoslav government to other French visitors.

For the rest of the exhibition, the Yugoslav staff mostly had to face coldness, unpleasantness, and accusations of betrayal to the imperialist camp. They were questioned on various issues mentioned in the Resolution, notably the peasant question and the collectivization of land, but also the lack of democracy within the party, and their responses were rarely taken seriously (“some thought that the party had too many members, others that it had too few”).<sup>19</sup> A French militant compared the Yugoslav communist party with the French one, which he saw as more revolutionary and yet eager to accept criticism coming from the Soviet Union.<sup>20</sup> They were reproached: “Why did you not go to the [Cominform] meeting? How is it possible that eight [Communist] parties are mistaken, and that you are right?”<sup>21</sup> After all these accusations and insults, the woman in charge of the stand admitted that she had “felt sick from embarrassment”, and “could not believe that the masses could be deceived with such lies, and why, and who’s benefiting from this?”<sup>22</sup>

The staff of the WIDF also behaved differently towards the Yugoslav delegation after the Resolution. During the preparation of the exhibition, the Yugoslav staff had already had some trouble to do with their exhibition with the WIDF organizers.<sup>23</sup> What is more, the Yugoslav organizers were upset because the Italian pavilion nearby displayed a map of Italy, in which Istria was unequivocally shown as part of the Italian peninsula.<sup>24</sup> It was only after the Resolution, however, that the Yugoslav staff had to

18 “Razgovori na Izložbi”, Belgrade, Arhiv Jugoslavije, AFŽ fund, 141-21-410.

19 “Razgovori na Izložbi”, Belgrade, Arhiv Jugoslavije, AFŽ fund, 141-21-414.

20 “What do you want, you Yugoslav, you’re a young nation without revolutionary tradition, without any expert party leader, it’s clear that you have made mistakes and now is the moment to admit that you did not behave correctly. Look at us, a Party with such a revolutionary past, such revolutions, such an expert leadership, but when we were criticized we accepted it, and this is evidence of your weakness.” “Razgovori na Izložbi”, Belgrade, Arhiv Jugoslavije, AFŽ fund, 141-21-413.

21 “Razgovori na Izložbi”, Belgrade, Arhiv Jugoslavije, AFŽ fund, 141-21-414.

22 Ibidem.

23 For instance, the Yugoslav staff was asked to erase any reference to the Communist Party, in order not to “scare” women. The photographs of Mitra Mitrović and Vida Tomšić were not exhibited, and the French left-wing newspapers did not mention their pavilion in their reports about the opening, even if it was allegedly “one of the most beautiful”.

24 Belgrade, Arhiv Jugoslavije, AFŽ fund, 141-21-98. The installation wasn’t changed despite their protest, and some engineers argued that no one would have noticed, since “the French people do not know geography.” There was also a stand from the Free Territory of Trieste (whose pictures are published in *Donne*, July 1948), which portrayed life in zone B, under Yugoslavia,

face open expressions of hostility. According to Smilija Štimac, who was in charge of the delegation in Paris, the most unpleasant episode occurred on the last day during the closing ceremony. In their closing speech WIDF President Madame Cotton and another French woman praised the exhibition and the different delegations, but only briefly mentioned the Yugoslav presence. At a certain point, a French delegate seemed about to denounce a country that was distancing itself from the democratic countries, and Štimac writes that she was “prepared to stand up and leave the room. But everything went well. Only, I had sweat running down my back.”<sup>25</sup> Then the delegates of different countries exchanged presents and flowers, and for a long time nobody gave anything to the Yugoslavs. Finally, they received an anonymous bouquet, and another one from a women’s organization in the suburbs of Paris, “so that it wouldn’t be shameful [if they got none].”<sup>26</sup>

Only the Chinese delegate, Lu Tsui, came to the Yugoslav pavilion to buy some objects on the last day, and complimented the stand and expressed the wish to keep in touch. Smilija Štimac observed: “I was surprised by all this kindness and attention after so much unpleasantness, and that’s why I write about it.”<sup>27</sup> Even if the Yugoslav delegation had an apparently cordial meeting with the Soviet delegation, and attempted to show that their attitude towards the Soviet Union had not changed, the overall atmosphere remained tense until the end of the exhibition.<sup>28</sup> As made evident by these reports, the Yugoslav delegates definitely did not experience this exhibition as “the exhibition of universal friendship”, but rather as the beginning of a process of international boycott and isolation that would last for many years to come. In the next section I discuss the impact of increasing Cold War polarizations on the WIDF during the Budapest Congress in the winter of 1948. I describe how the Yugoslavs were gradually turned from model comrades into unwanted guests, and how AFŽ leaders responded to their growing international isolation.

### 1.3. “Sisterhood was no longer innocent”: the second WIDF Congress in Budapest

The year 1948 marked an increase in global polarizations in the opposition between the Western and the Soviet blocs. The Soviets consolidated their position in Eastern Europe, notably with the communist coup in Czechoslovakia in February 1948 and

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as peaceful and rewarding, with women studying and building socialism. The pictures of zone A, including Trieste, showed crowds of angry women demonstrating against Anglo-American imperialism.

25 “O međunarodnoj izložbi žena u Parizu”, Belgrade, Arhiv Jugoslavije, AFŽ fund, 141-21-423.

26 Ibidem.

27 Ibidem.

28 For instance, the Yugoslav representatives had trouble in finding workers who would disassemble their exhibition, and they had to hire a night guard for the surveillance of their valuable objects, “since in that situation I wasn’t sure of anything.” Some objects were damaged while packing and some others, deposited at the Trieste stand, were never retrieved. According to Smilija Štimac “that was not by chance.” Ivi, 141-21-425 ;426.



with the Berlin blockade of April 1948, which accelerated Anglo-American politics of “containment” of the communist influence in Europe, as manifested in the Berlin airlift and the Marshall plan. The politics of containment also had a significant impact on the Italian elections of April 1948, in which the Christian-Democrats won a victory over the Popular Front alliance of Socialists and Communists after having received considerable material support from the United States. The polarizations accelerated what scholars have defined as the “cultural Cold War” (Scott-Smith and Krabbendam 2003; Mitter and Major 2004). Whereas the United States promoted their image as defenders of freedom against Eastern totalitarianism, the Soviet Union in turn relied on slogans of peace, economic justice and national self-determination against Western imperialism. In the meantime, the “red scare” was starting to take effect in the United States, with the blacklisting of federal officers, journalists and cultural producers suspected of communist sympathies. Any form of social critique or affiliation with left-wing organizations was equated with pro-Soviet, and thus anti-American espionage. On their side, the Soviets increased political repression in the satellite countries, establishing a tighter control over Eastern European communist parties through internal purges, arrests and executions.<sup>29</sup> The Western communist parties of Italy and France – now excluded from anti-communist governments, and themselves facing state repression of workers’ movements – proceeded to assume a more radical position, supporting class-based organizing and adopting anti-imperialist slogans (for instance by campaigning against the Marshall Plan).<sup>30</sup>

The leaders of the WIDF, notably French women, took a manifestly pro-Soviet position in their Resolutions; as I will show in this section, however, it would be wrong to assume that these Resolutions were unanimously accepted by all the progressive women belonging to the international federation. Even if conflicts and disagreements were not expressed in the official documents, traces of them can be seen in the memoirs and travel diaries of the women who participated to WIDF Congresses in the late 1940s. The 1948 Budapest Congress is a case in point: not all the WIDF members accepted the unilateral condemnation of Anglo-American imperialism and the glorification of the Soviet Union. Moreover, the Yugoslav delegation, isolated from the others because of the Cominform Resolution, started to voice a critique of the undemocratic methods implemented by the Federation, a critique that they would pursue throughout the 1950s.

Women’s historian Gerda Lerner, who, because of her Jewish background, fled Nazi-occupied Vienna in 1939 and moved to the United States, where she joined the left-wing Congress of American Women (later disbanded by the House Un-American Activities Committee), tells of her attendance of the Budapest Congress in December 1948 in her autobiography. She revisited Vienna for the first time after her exile before continuing to Budapest. Although she thought that people looked equally “worn out”

29 “In an era of intense conflict between East and West, Soviet (and later SED) officials became convinced that capitalist spies were undermining socialism throughout East Central Europe—just as Senator Joseph McCarthy was sure that Soviet agents were ruining the fabric of American life in the United States.” (Epstein 2003: 130).

30 About the radicalization of the PCI after 1947 see Urban (1986) and Pons (2001).

in the two cities, Budapest made a better impression because of the rapid reconstruction of the city, while in Vienna, “three years after the war’s end, most of the bombed buildings had been fenced off from sight, but the rubble had not been removed (2002: 265).”<sup>31</sup> Lerner writes of her amazement upon entering the Congress, which looked to her like a “United Nations of women”, all determined to prevent another war:

“as various groups of European women during the Congress spoke about their lives and experiences, the suffering, devastation and personal cost of the war came alive. As we gathered for the opening session in the great hall, sisterhood seemed real and tangible among the women from fifty-six nations, all so visibly different and yet all working for world peace and nuclear disarmament. We might not have been able to communicate across barriers of language and custom, but we smiled as our eyes met, we hugged and found other ways of expressing good will” (2002: 265).

The antifascist sisterhood inaugurated in 1945, however, had gradually been challenged by Cold War polarizations. The WIDF Resolution approved during the 1948 Congress established a clear moral hierarchy between women, one that now decisively portrayed Soviet and Eastern European women as more “advanced” in their anti-imperialist consciousness. While all women in the WIDF were invited to fight against imperialist wars in Greece, China, Vietnam, Indonesia, Malaysia, Burma and South Korea, it was specifically women from the USA, the UK, France and Holland who were summoned to ask their government to disarm, since “no people can be free while oppressing another.” Women in capitalist countries were asked to “demand the abolition of anti-labor laws [and] protest against the persecution of democratic organizations and their leaders” while the women from the countries of “new democracy” were asked to “continue their fight for the economic development of their countries and for the strengthening of their democracy.”<sup>32</sup> Women from the colonial and semi-colonial countries were called upon to extend their fight against imperialism and for the independence of their countries, while Soviet women were charged with strengthening their homeland, “bulwark of peace and democracy.”<sup>33</sup>

Unlike women from socialist countries, therefore, Western women were encouraged to take a critical stance against the crimes of their government and to make themselves accountable.<sup>34</sup> Gerda Lerner (2002: 267) recalls her feelings of

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31 Italian women made a similar comment after their visit to Belgrade in 1945. They compared the speedy reconstruction and cleaned streets of Yugoslavia with the rubble that was still widespread in Italian cities. Belgrade, Arhiv Jugoslavije, AFŽ fund, 141-24-22 ;141-24-23.

32 “Zapisnik Izvršnog Odbora AFŽ”, 16-17 Dec 1948, Belgrade, Arhiv Jugoslavije, AFŽ fund, 141-8, pp. 13-15.

33 Ivi. About the superior image of Soviet women in WIDF publications, see also Ilić (2010).

34 The House Un-American Activities Committee, in its report about the CAW, clearly represented these feelings of solidarity and accountability expressed by American women towards European women: “With apparent shame and mortification, Miss Flynn explained: “We were increasingly conscious of our warm clothes, well-filled suitcases and purses,” and the fact that her group came from a “richer, safer, happier” land. (...) Why these women did not feel called upon to extol the virtues of the land with such blessings and why they lost no opportunity to

shame and guilt when meeting with Greek partisan women. The Greek women wore US military uniforms taken from the defeated Greek royalist troops, who were sponsored by the United States. Even if the Greek women did not hold the American women's delegation responsible for Truman's aid to the royalists, Lerner felt guilty as an American citizen. She felt in fact that "the moral high ground I had been accustomed to taking as victim of fascism was shattered. Now I belonged to those whom others regarded as their oppressors. Sisterhood was no longer innocent, but had become infinitely complex."

The new difficulties of the international antifascist sisterhood also became apparent when discussing the final resolution of the Congress. The resolution was openly pro-Soviet and harshly condemned the US government, so that the American CAW delegates pointed out that it would be very difficult to use this resolution in their home country, where they would run the risk of becoming an easy target of anti-communist discourses. Other Western European delegates, such as the Swedish, felt the same: "We suggested that an international Congress should put resolutions in a more neutral frame of reference and above all should stress positive work for peace, rather than blaming one country for all the political tensions in the world" (Lerner 2002: 268). However, WIDF President Nina Popova argued that the document was accepted by the Executive Committee of the WIDF and therefore could not be changed to suit the needs of a particular delegation. In the end the CAW delegates did not file any formal protest, but resolved not to propagate the Congress' main resolution in the United States.<sup>35</sup>

Another problematic aspect of the Congress was its treatment of the Yugoslav delegation. In preparation for the Budapest Congress, the AFŽ central committee published a series of brochures expounding the merits of the Yugoslav antifascist Resistance and all the work done by the AFŽ for Yugoslav women and for the popularizing of WIDF resolutions. As a reaction to the Cominform Resolution, they attempted to emphasize the great importance of the AFŽ to the WIDF so far.<sup>36</sup> However, in Budapest the treatment towards the Yugoslav delegation was clearly discriminatory, and they faced a number of incidents and provocations. They were not able, for instance, to obtain extra visas for their translators and their guests; they found an Albanian newspaper denouncing Tito on their desk; their flag was not visible like the flags of all the other different delegations. Mitra Mitrović was not allowed to respond when some criticisms towards Yugoslavia were voiced, and in a meeting in front of factory

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eulogize a land without them is something for a psychologist to fathom" (HUAC 1949).

<sup>35</sup> We will see how the Federation's 'ideological line' on Cold War issues, and both its connections and contradictions with women's interests – would be debated and contested many times in the years to come, due to the different positions and geopolitical interests of the various delegations (see Chapter 7).

<sup>36</sup> As mentioned earlier, for some time after the Resolution the Yugoslav leaders were still trying to prove that the Resolution was erroneous and based on misinformation, and that they were dutiful followers of the Soviet example.

workers the Soviet delegation reminded everybody of the “mistakes” of the Yugoslav government, upon which the entire Yugoslav delegation left the room.<sup>37</sup>

Despite these insults and censures, international delegates were still quite open towards the Yugoslav representatives due the immense prestige of the Yugoslav Resistance, and freely asked them for reports on the state of affairs in their country, since they had had a positive image of it so far. A Slovenian woman that was part of the American delegation asked them for clarifications about the situation, saying “I have already heard about this from one side, now I want to hear it from another side.”<sup>38</sup> Although isolated from the Federation, in December 1948 the Yugoslav women were still hoping that the situation could improve and that the Soviet Union might revise its position. Once in Belgrade, AFŽ leaders wrote a letter of protest, listing the unpleasant incidents that had occurred in Budapest. They mainly held the Hungarian leaders responsible, but also reproached the WIDF leaders for not having “reacted in time” against the provocations, which, they claimed, weakened the “unity” of the Federation, and thus the democratic struggle against world imperialism.<sup>39</sup> The fact that the discriminatory treatment during the Congress wasn’t made public through an open denunciation probably reflects the WIDF leadership’s uncertainty about how to handle the presence of the Yugoslav delegation, whose members were still part of the WIDF decision-making organs and had gained a considerable prestige. The exclusion came only some months later, in September 1949, and it wasn’t openly ratified by any Congress, but only enforced by the Secretariat of the Federation in a unilateral manner, through a letter sent to the AFŽ headquarters.

These examples demonstrate that women’s internationalist solidarity based on the common experience of antifascist struggle – a solidarity that had never been without problems – was complicated even more by impending Cold War divides. In the next section I will discuss the exclusion of Yugoslav delegates from the WIDF, an event that contradicts official WIDF representations of women as peacemakers who are naturally drawn to reciprocal solidarity across borders. Paradoxically, increasing Cold War tensions challenged the discourse of women’s unity across borders, a discourse which had been very important in the creation of the WIDF after 1945.

#### 1.4. The break of UDI-AFŽ relations and the exclusion of the AFŽ from the WIDF

The international isolation of Yugoslavia continued to grow in 1949, but in the spring of that year it still seemed possible for the local authorities to resolve their conflict with the Soviet Union. The Yugoslavs adopted the internationalist discourse of anti-imperialism and frequently paid homage to the USSR. On the 1st of March

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37 “Zapisnik Izvršnog Odbora AFŽ”, 16-17 Dec 1948, Belgrade, Arhiv Jugoslavije, AFŽ fund, 141-8, pp. 18-27 ; see also the letter of protest dated 17.1.49 by AFŽ delegation in Budapest (in French) 141-17-637-640.

38 “Zapisnik Izvršnog Odbora AFŽ”, 16-17 Dec 1948, Belgrade, Arhiv Jugoslavije, AFŽ fund, 141-8, p.23.

39 Letter of protest by AFŽ delegation in Budapest (in French) dated 17.1.49 141-17-637-640.

1949, the AFŽ sent a letter to the UDI, calling upon Italian women to protest against the definitive acquittal of general Roatta, an Italian army officer who been in charge of concentration camps in the fascist-occupied province Ljubljana and in the Dalmatian Littoral during Second World War, and had committed many war crimes.<sup>40</sup> Although Yugoslavia asked for his extradition, Roatta managed to evade persecution in 1945, benefited from the general amnesty of 1946 and later moved to Franco's Spain with the help of the Vatican, where he resided until the end of his life.<sup>41</sup> The letter to the UDI denounced the continuity between the new Italian government and the old fascist regime, which allowed for the release of war criminals, and urged Italian "democratic women" to oppose this. In the letter, the AFŽ still praised the Soviet Union as head of the struggle against imperialism. The imperialism at stake was not only Anglo-American, however, but also, for instance, that of Italy and of the Vatican.<sup>42</sup>

On the 8<sup>th</sup> of March 1949, the UDI – perhaps partly in reaction against the letter on general Roatta – sent the usual 8<sup>th</sup> of March greetings to the AFŽ. In this message, however, the UDI leaders appealed to Yugoslav women to "return to the common struggle for peace and against the intrigues of Anglo-American imperialism, in close union with the Soviet Union, the countries of new democracy and the peoples of the world."<sup>43</sup> Similar "greetings" and provocations were sent to the AFŽ by the Union of French Women in the spring of 1949. On the 13<sup>th</sup> of April the AFŽ secretariat rejected these "insinuations" of having moved to the imperialist camp. They accused the UDI of deceiving Italian women about the real situation in Yugoslavia, instead of joining forces with the AFŽ in the world struggle against imperialism.<sup>44</sup> From these two letters we can see how the AFŽ-UDI bilateral relations were already ridden with tensions due to the legacies of Fascism and the Second World War. After the 1948 Resolution tensions could be openly expressed, since the UDI and the AFŽ now found

40 Belgrade, Arhiv Jugoslavije, AFŽ fund, 141-24-81 ;82 ;83. In the AFŽ letter, Roatta was accused of having directed the concentration camp of Arbe/Rab, with 35.000 detainees and 4.500 victims. He was also accused of commanding the special court of Šibenik, which had executed 400 people. They also mentioned the fact that entire villages in Dalmatia had been burned and their population massacred in the autumn of 1942.

41 Ironically, the amnesty that allowed many former Fascists to evade trial for their war crimes was signed by PCI leader Togliatti, while he was still minister of Justice in the antifascist postwar government. This compromise was deeply resented within the ranks of the PCI itself, notably by former partisans and antifascists who had suffered torture and whose perpetrators never stood trial. This was one of the elements which gave rise of the idea of the 'betrayed Resistance' among radical leftist groups, an idea that was revived in the 1970s by the far left. About Italy's postwar continuity with the Fascist state, see Franzinelli (2006).

42 During the Rome WIDF Council in May 1948, the AFŽ delegation had formulated a resolution against imperialism that condemned the Italian government and the Vatican in very harsh tones. The final WIDF resolution omitted these initial statements.

43 19 Marzo 49: "Chères Amies, à l'occasion du 8 Mars nous souhaitons aux femmes de Yougoslavie de reprendre le chemin de la lutte commune pour la paix et contre les menées de l'imperialisme anglo-américain, en union étroite avec l'Union Soviétique, les Pays de démocratie nouvelle et les peuples du monde entier." Belgrade, Arhiv Jugoslavije, AFŽ fund, 141-24-88.

44 Belgrade, Arhiv Jugoslavije, AFŽ fund, 141-24-90; 91.

themselves on opposite sides of the intra-communist divide between the Soviet bloc and Yugoslavia.

The situation worsened in the summer<sup>45</sup>, and in the autumn of 1949 the Soviet-Yugoslav split became irrecoverable. In a letter dated 28 September 1949, and signed by the Secretary General Marie-Claude Vaillant-Couturier<sup>46</sup>, the WIDF Secretariat communicated its decision to exclude Yugoslav delegates from the following plenary meetings in Moscow. The WIDF Secretariat explained that they had received protest letters from a number of women's delegations, among which Chinese, Canadian, Greek and French, complaining about about "Tito's betrayal" and "turning to the imperialist camp". As a consequence, the Federation decided to interrogate the attitudes of the Yugoslav delegates, Mitra Mitrović, Olga Milosević, Vanda Novosel and Vida Tomšić, and concluded that they continued their support of the Yugoslav government's "antidemocratic politics of terror", which went against "the interests and the will" of the Yugoslav people, as shown by a "growing opposition movement" within Yugoslavia. According to the WIDF Secretariat, therefore, the Yugoslav delegates could no longer be considered the legitimate representatives of the women of Yugoslavia, and therefore had no right to participate in the Moscow Council. Since they supported the "war-monger" Tito, in fact, their presence at the Council would be "as inconceivable as the presence of representatives of feminine organizations supporting Franco, Tsaldaris or Tchang Kai Chek."<sup>47</sup> After this decision was made, all the national branches of the WIDF broke off their relations with the AFŽ.<sup>48</sup>

The AFŽ leadership immediately reacted against WIDF decision and against its attempts to internationally isolate Yugoslav women. They sent a wealth of counter-information publications in different languages to all women's organizations affiliated with the WIDF, with the aim of raising sympathy for Yugoslavia. As they explained, "we should not forget that in the leadership bodies of democratic women's organiza-

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45 In the summer of 1949, the AFŽ protested to the WIDF against the recent refusal to accord visas to the Yugoslav youth delegation to the World Congress of Youth for Peace, held in Budapest in August 1949.

46 Marie-Claude Vaillant-Couturier (born Vogel, 1912-1996) was born in a family engaged in art and journalism. She became one of the first female photoreporters, and in 1934 she became affiliated to the Jeunesse Communiste. In 1937 she married Pierre Vaillant-Couturier, a communist politician and journalist. As a reporter for *l'Humanité* and *Vu*, she covered the rise of Nazism in Germany and the Spanish Civil War. She worked in the Resistance under the Vichy regime, and was deported to Auschwitz-Birkenau in January 1943. In August 1944, she was transferred to Ravensbruck until the Liberation. After the war, she was elected to Parliament and she became involved in the WIDF. She continued her engagement with the associations of former deportees and she testified at the Nuremberg trials.

47 "Décision du secretariat", 28.9.1949, Belgrade, Arhiv Jugoslavije, AFŽ fund, 141-18-367 ; 368.

48 The Union of Italian Women approved this decision during its Third National Congress held in October 1949 in Rome. In a letter dated 26.10.49 this decision was communicated to the AFŽ. The AFŽ delegates were accused of supporting the Yugoslav leadership and of having made themselves "complicit" with the crimes of Tito's regime. In this way, they "had placed themselves out of the great world organization of democratic women with their own hands." Belgrade, Arhiv Jugoslavije, AFŽ fund, 141-24-94 ; 95 ; 96.

tions there are certainly a lot of women who disagree with the actions of their representatives in the Federation, but [information about] the facts and our materials are not yet available to them.”<sup>49</sup>

AFŽ leaders defended themselves by denouncing the lies and undemocratic methods of the WIDF. In a letter (in French) accompanying a Memorandum sent to all WIDF Council members in October 1949, the AFŽ Central Committee argued that excluding the Yugoslav representatives meant in effect the exclusion of all Yugoslav women, who were working every day for “peace and the progress of humanity”. They asked that a WIDF investigative commission to be dispatched to Yugoslavia, in order to investigate the attitude of Yugoslav women towards their AFŽ representatives, and to re-establish the truth about this “most active” and “most progressive” of WIDF branches. They complained that the WIDF Secretariat’s decision had transformed the Federation into a “branch of the Information Bureau, working under the diktat of some Parties and adopting unjust and undemocratic decisions against millions of women, and even against an entire country.”<sup>50</sup>

Following the Yugoslav leadership’s statements, the AFŽ leaders started to put forward the argument of national sovereignty and self-determination, portraying Yugoslavia as a small underdeveloped nation fighting once again for independence, against the unequal, exploitative treatment that smaller socialist countries received from the developed, mighty Soviet Union. They specifically referred to their United Nations action agitating “for relations of parity between big and small peoples”, and for the liberation of each people from “foreign hegemony”, as a condition for world peace.<sup>51</sup> The AFŽ leaders relied on their moral authority as antifascist fighters, and representatives of a people that had bravely resisted the invasion of foreign armies. The Yugoslav people, they argued, was prepared to stand again behind its leadership in order to resist another attempt to undermine its independence. The history of the antifascist Resistance, therefore, was mobilized to disprove Cominform accusations of “fascism”. They demanded that the WIDF explain “how it is possible for Yugoslav women, who had fought with so much self-sacrifice against fascism, to have suddenly become fascists, condoning the ‘fascist’ policy of their government.”<sup>52</sup>

Mitra Mitrović, in a long and rather personal letter addressed to Madame Cotton, tried to defend once again the position of the AFŽ delegates. Already on the first page she pointed to the hypocrisy and the absurdities of the WIDF statements, which

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49 “(...) a ne treba zaboraviti da je u rukovodstva demokratskih ženska organizacija ima svakako mnogo žena koje se ne slažu sa postupcima njihovih predstavnica u Federaciji, samo im činjenice i naši materiali nisu još dostupni.” “AFŽ i Međunarodni Demokratski Pokret Žena. Referat drugarice Mitra Mitrović”, Belgrade, Arhiv Jugoslavije, AFŽ fund, 141-7-414.

50 “Memorandum du Comité Central du FAF de Yougoslavie”, Belgrade, Arhiv Jugoslavije, AFŽ fund, 141-18-375.

51 Ibidem.

52 “[k]ako je moguće da jugoslovenske žene, koje su se toliko požrtvovanja borile protiv fašizma, odjedanput postanu i same fašisti, i jedinstveno odobravaju “fašisticku” politiku svog rukovodstva.” AFŽ i Međunarodni Demokratski Pokret Žena. Referat drugarice Mitra Mitrović”, Belgrade, Arhiv Jugoslavije, AFŽ fund, 141-7-411.

claimed a great sympathy towards the Yugoslav peoples, while accusing its leaders of being “traitors, Trotskyites, spies, who participated in the revolution on behalf of the Gestapo!”<sup>53</sup> Mitrović claimed that despite the enormous pressure exerted by the Soviet Union and its satellite countries, the Yugoslav people were standing by their leaders, since the leadership was for the first time working in the interests of the people. Mitrović argued that the popularity of the communists among the people was precisely due to the fact that they were building schools, factories and health clinics, so that the people “are assured that this leadership will really take the country out of its secular backwardness.”<sup>54</sup> According to Mitrović, despite this progress in the advancement of socialism and despite the Yugoslav people’s attachment to the Soviet Union, the USSR was, in fact, inventing all sort of allegations and financing dubious “political émigrés” to overthrow the government: “the Soviet government – and other governments too – would make use even of the devil to overthrow the leaders of our country, whose independence is annoying them, in whatever way they could.”<sup>55</sup>

Mitrović respectfully demanded that Madame Cotton, as president of the WIDE, stops the Federation’s complicity with the Cominform campaign against Yugoslavia, asking her to allow the Yugoslav representatives to attend the Moscow Council. I include here an extract from Mitra Mitrović’s letter, since it has a very personal, direct tone, and hints at the difficulties faced by the AFŽ leaders after the Cominform Resolution. It also clearly shows the AFŽ leaders’ identification with the Yugoslav government, and their refusal to comply with USSR dictates. AFŽ leaders’ righteous indignation is abundantly evident in this letter.

Mitra Mitrović, 36 years at the time, who had been a “communist for 19 years (...), and member of the Party for 15 years”, wrote:

It embarrasses me to talk about us [AFŽ representatives] without this seeming like a justification or a lack of modesty. But, since these offenses are directed against us personally as well as against the women of Yugoslavia, there is something to I have say: look at my life, at the lives of comrade Vida, Olga and Vanda, and you will see that since our earliest youth we have consecrated our lives to the struggle for freedom and democracy, to the struggle for socialism. Since 1941, we have participated in the people’s liberation struggle, and we were also in the concentration camps. (...) Our Party made us into fighters, and not into some traitors who, under a simple order from Moscow, would cover it [the Party] with mud, and would be recognized, then, as traitors and spies. This makes no sense at all! We are the same

53 Letter of Mitra Mitrović to Madame Cotton, 5.10.49, Belgrade, Arhiv Jugoslavije, AFŽ fund, 141-18-450 till 141-18-462.

54 141-18-453. Mitrović’s letter contains interesting statements concerning Yugoslavia’s geopolitical and historical position in Europe. She writes: “Our country is one of the most backward in Europe. As I have said, we have lived for too long under foreign slavery, and it is notably the domination of such a backward country, feudal Turkey, which weighted on us and pulled us backward.” 141-18-452. In the next chapter I will assess some AFŽ modernization campaigns, and its fight against “backwardness” in the rural areas.

55 Ibidem, 141-18-456.



as before, the same as we were in 1945 in Paris, the same as we were during the armed struggle of our people.<sup>56</sup>

In Mitrović's letter, the reference to the 1945 WIDF Congress in Paris was a response to an earlier letter from the Bureau of Union des Femmes Françaises (UFF) to the WIDF, in which the UFF Bureau stated their refusal to attend the plenary session if the Yugoslav delegates were present. The UFF letter lamented that the present leaders of AFŽ were "not speaking in the name of those peasant women and workers, those wonderful women and national heroes, whom [they] met at the first WIDF Congress in Paris." The AFŽ, however, could easily demonstrate that its 1948 delegates were the same ones who had attended the Paris conference, showing the shallowness and the hypocrisy of UFF arguments.

The Cominform and WIDF campaigns aimed at showing that the current Yugoslav representatives had lost the mandate of the "people", while Yugoslav – and AFŽ – leaders maintained their claim that the Yugoslav peoples supported the government. Mitra Mitrović's letter clearly stated that "millions of Yugoslav women" were standing behind the AFŽ leaders, and would have voted for them once more in case they had an election. In Mitrović's view, millions of AFŽ supporters could not "have become fascists, traitors, Trotskyites, spies." Yugoslav women had experienced capitalism, fascist occupation and revolution, and could see for themselves that these accusations were false. As a result, according to Mitrović, they were protesting against the WIDF decision all over Yugoslavia. By excluding the AFŽ representatives, therefore, the WIDF was excluding "3,800,000" Yugoslav women who were part of the Federation.<sup>57</sup>

The progressive isolation and exclusion of the Yugoslav delegations from internationalist meetings paved the way for the Second Cominform Resolution in the autumn of 1949. On the 29<sup>th</sup> of November 1949 a second Cominform Resolution was published, calling the Yugoslav leaders a "clique" of "assassins" and "fascist spies", who had "definitely passed from bourgeois nationalism to fascism."<sup>58</sup> The Resolution explicitly indicates: "the fight against the Tito clique, the clique of the assassins and

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56 "Il est gênant pour moi de parler de nous, – sans que cela ressemble à quelque justification ou à un manque de modestie. Mais, puisqu'il s'agit ici de telles injures dirigées contre nous personnellement et contre les femmes de Yougoslavie, j'aurais cependant quelque chose à dire: regardez ma vie, et celle des camarades Vida, Olga et Vanda, et vous verrez que dès notre prime [première] jeunesse nous la consacraâmes à la lutte pour la liberté et la démocratie, à la lutte pour le socialisme. Depuis 1941, nous avons participé à la lutte de libération populaire, et nous avons aussi connu les camps (...) Notre Parti a fait de nous des combattants et non des traîtres qui, sur un simple ordre de Moscou, le couvriraient de boue, et se reconnaîtraient eux-mêmes traîtres et espions. Ce sont là des choses insensées! Nous sommes ce que nous fûmes naguère, ce que nous fûmes en 1945 à Paris, ce que nous fûmes dans la lutte armée de nos peuples." Ibidem, 141-18-457.

57 Ibidem, 141-18-458.

58 While in the rest of the Soviet bloc politicians such as Hungarian Lázló Rajk and Albanian Koci Xoxe were arrested and executed as "Titoist spies", a secret Cominform meeting was held in Budapest in November 1949, resulting in the explicit order to overthrow Tito (while the previous Resolution had still given him the possibility to repent).

hired spies, is an international duty for all Communists and workers' parties."<sup>59</sup> In late 1949 Yugoslavia was thus facing extreme political isolation and an economic blockade from the Soviet bloc. It also faced military provocations at its borders with Hungary, Romania, Bulgaria and Albania, while rumors about a possible Red Army invasion of Yugoslavia started to circulate internationally. The call to overthrow the current Yugoslav leadership circulated all over the Soviet bloc, and the language used by the Cominform became more and more violent.

One astonishing example of how previous internationalist discourses could be reversed is a report from the WIDF Moscow Council in November 1949 in which the Spanish Pasionaria Dolores Ibarruri argued that the Yugoslav representatives had been excluded "because under their antifascists mask they were hiding their true face of deceitful, vile spies and creatures of fascist leaders. Even in the era of the Yugoslav people's liberation war against the Nazi invaders, these 'representatives', Mitrović and Vida Tomšić, were agents of the Gestapo and of the Italian police."<sup>60</sup> This was the general tone of statements about Yugoslavia during the WIDF 1949 Moscow Council, according to the travel diaries of UDAIS leaders Marija Bernetić and Laura Weiss.<sup>61</sup> Yet, even in this case, there were disagreements among the different international delegates, which are not reported in the official statements and publications of the WIDF.<sup>62</sup>

Cominform declarations never targeted the Yugoslav people as a whole, but instead appealed to the "masses" (occasionally to "women") and incited them to overthrow their illegitimate representatives. Opposing them, Yugoslav communist leaders and the AFŽ constantly claimed to be the legitimate representatives of the Yugoslav "peoples" and of Yugoslavia's "feminine masses". I discuss the relation between female communist leaders and "feminine masses" in the following sections of this chapter and

59 See <http://www.osaarchivum.org/files/holdings/300/8/3/text/78-4-102.shtml>

60 Conseil de la Federation Democratique Internationale des Femmes, Moscou 17-22 novembre 1949, supplement de la revue *La Femme Sovietique*, n.6, 1949, p.12.

61 According to Bernetić's handwritten notes, Greek participants denounced Tito's betrayal, and so did Nina Popova, while Ibarruri denounced the "Titoist women M.M. and V.T. ; Rosetta Longo also made statements about Yugoslav delegates' support for the warmongering government." (Trieste, Istituto Livio Saranz, fondo Bernetić, Busta 1, fascicolo 6, diari e appunti 1949-1981, Terzo quaderno del 1949). According to Weiss, a chief argument was Tito's "backstabbing" of Greece. After having supported the Greek communists in the Greek civil war for three years, in 1949 Yugoslavia closed its borders to Greek communist fighters, who took the side of the Cominform (for a reconstruction of Yugoslavia's role in the Greek Civil War, see Ristovic 2006).

62 According to Weiss' diary, there was a very "animated discussion" within the commission about the economic situation. Weiss's proposal to include a condemnation of Tito – because of the economic situation in Yugoslavia and of the division of the working masses – found a "notable resistance" among some of the delegates. The delegates from South America and Algeria accepted only the first part of the proposal; another delegate (undecipherable name) excessively praised Tito, which led to "outbursts". I am interpreting here Weiss' handwritten notes. (Trieste, Istituto Livio Saranz, fondo Weiss, f. 32 c6 cv 636 p.160, quaderno di viaggio URSS del 49 e viaggio a Varsavia nel 47).

in the next chapters. While in these sections I have considered the public documents produced by the AFŽ and the WIDF leaderships at the international levels, in the next sections I look at the way in which the Soviet-Yugoslav split affected the “masses” of rank-and-file female militants were in Yugoslavia, Italy, and the Italo-Yugoslav border area, and particularly at the waves of political repression and intra-communist enmity that continued from 1949 until the mid 1950s.

## **2. Intra-communist wars in Yugoslavia, Italy and the Italo-Yugoslav border area**

### **2.1. The making of Yugoslav “Cominformists”**

While people were silent about it [Goli Otok],  
it was a hard rock on which the [Yugoslav] state relied.  
When people began to speak about it, even the state began to crumble.  
(Božidar Jezernik 1994: 686. Quoted in Jambrešić-Kirin, 2009)

Within Yugoslavia, alleged “Ibeovci”<sup>63</sup> or “Cominformists”, that is, those siding with the USSR after 1948, were widely repressed, but this repression was erased from the official discourse until the 1980s, when the crisis of the socialist regime prompted the emergence of private memories that had been silenced until then.<sup>64</sup> Yugoslavia was in a dire economic and political situation in 1948. According to the testimony of PCI militant Alfredo Bonelli (1910-1999), who emigrated from Milan to Rijeka (Fiume in Italian) in the spring of 1948 to join his Croatian wife, standards of living were very low, with shortages of meat, fruit, and of all kinds of other basic products (soap, razors, needles etc.) The conditions gradually worsened after the Resolution, so that in the winter of 1948-49 no fruit could be found, while in the next winter there was no wine available. The shortage and rationing of food and basic products was even more intolerable since a whole “new class” of bureaucrats and privileged functionaries had emerged, which was not subjected to food rationing and were provided for in special shops. Bonelli thus tells of a “spontaneous dissatisfaction” among the people, with the way in which the revolutionary elite had become bureaucratized and removed from the everyday needs of the population.<sup>65</sup>

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<sup>63</sup> Singular “Ib-eovac”, from IB, Informbiro, the Yugoslav abbreviation of Communist Information Bureau (or Cominform).

<sup>64</sup> The first movie dealing openly with this issue is Emir Kusturica’s *When father was away on business* (1985) based on the real story of the father of his screenwriter, poet and writer Abdulah Sidran.

<sup>65</sup> See Bonelli (1994). In a letter to his mother, Bonelli estimated that the living conditions in Yugoslavia were in between the ones of Northern and Southern Italy. Still, unemployment “did not exist” and skilled workers were in great demand. Many unemployed men from Italy, mostly peasants from the neighboring regions, still came to look for work. See Rome, Istituto

According to Bonelli, the common people in Yugoslavia saw the Cominform Resolution as an “internal issue between communists, with no relevance for everyday life” (Bonelli 1994: 31). Eva Grlić, however, relates how among rank and file party militants and leftist intellectuals, many people who had become critical of the current lack of democracy interpreted the Resolution as partially justified. This happened notably with old communists and former fighters who were dissatisfied with the leadership’s decisions. Eva Grlić (2005: 139) says that she was angry with Tito and the leadership, for portraying the Soviet system as ideal. Now, instead, the propaganda had been reversed: “(...) in the USSR everything was wrong, all was lie and crime, but we learned this only because the CPSU, with Stalin at its head, had decided to kick us out of Cominform. It was impossible at this point to establish where truth was: evidently there were lies on both sides.”<sup>66</sup>

Paradoxically, when the split became irrevocable, Yugoslav leaders, intent upon their own survival at any cost, ended up adopting the same Stalinist methods in their attempts to counter Cominform attacks on their government. The political repression waged by the Yugoslav government against Cominformists started in the autumn of 1948, and increased rapidly during 1949. This wave of political repression, mainly carried out by the UDBA, the secret information services, affected many thousands of people indiscriminately, not only active “Cominformists”, but also many who had no clear opinion on the Tito-Stalin split. An overheard joke about Tito was enough to condemn one to a tour of infamous prisons such as Sremska Mitrovica, before being banished to the infamous secret prison island Goli Otok, a barren rocky stretch of land in the Adriatic Sea, or to Sveti Grgur, another island nearby which hosted the women’s prison. The prison conditions on the islands were extremely harsh, with forced labor, insufficient food, and compulsory “re-education” sessions among the inmates, which included reciprocal beatings and denunciations, so that no one could leave the island without feeling guilty or responsible towards the other inmates (Banac 1988; Bonelli 1994; Scotti 1997; Jambrešić-Kirin 2009, 2008).

Banac (1988) has calculated that a total of 55,600 people were put on trial as “Cominformists”, with around 17,000 men and 860 women arrested and incarcerated as political prisoners, but the sources are sparse and incomplete. Many records of Cominformist trials were destroyed after Yugoslavia’s reconciliation with the Soviet Union in the mid-1950s. As with the Stalinist purges of the 1930s, the political repres-

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Gramsci, Fondo Mosca, Busta 135 Jugoslavia e Venezia Giulia. As mentioned earlier, few thousands of Italian workers and families from the bordering cities had moved to Yugoslavia in the years 1946-1947, when the PCI journal *L’Unità* painted the situation of Yugoslavia in rosy colors, and the local communist sections actively encouraged their militants to go “on the other side” to help with the construction of socialism, and also as a way to counter the “exodus” of Italian exiles from Istria and Dalmatia. See Giuseppini (2008) and later in this chapter.

<sup>66</sup> Italian communist militants had a similar reaction of disillusionment in 1956, when Stalin’s crimes were revealed during Khrushchev’s “Secret Speech” at the twentieth Congress of the PCUS. Compare the words of Eva Grlić with the statements by Laura Weiss quoted at the opening of Chapter 7. In both cases, the sudden change in the official “Truth” provoked disbelief and distrust towards the communist leadership.

sion mainly affected the middle and lower cadres of the Yugoslav state, notably former partisan fighters and long-standing antifascist militants who had become part of the state administration as local officers, journalists and doctors. Many of them endured the Goli Otok concentration camp after having survived the hardships of partisan war and in some cases Nazi concentration camps. Some found the Goli Otok camp even harder to bear, as the repression was at the hand of the socialist state, and there were no guards, but only fellow prisoners incited against each other and encouraged to earn their “redemption” by mistreating their fellow inmates.<sup>67</sup> Even after their release, former detainees continued to live in a state of fear and mistrust and were forced to periodically report on their surroundings at the police station.<sup>68</sup> For many years, their citizenship rights were suspended, their property confiscated, they were refused employment and ostracized by their surroundings. All of this deepened past traumas and fears.

As Renata Jambrešić-Kirin notes (2009), the first literary renditions of male inmates’ experiences at Goli Otok were already published in the mid-Fifties. The publication of non-fiction studies and survivors’ testimonies became possible only in the 1980s, when the crisis of the Yugoslav regime started. Yet, as she points out, women’s memoirs and testimonies about their detention on Goli Otok (such as those by Eva Grlić, Jenny Lebl, and Rosa Dragović-Gaspar) were made public only forty years after their release from custody, in the 1990s and 2000s. This phenomenon, she argues, “says a lot about the lack of women’s statements on internal dissent, the marginalization of women as subjects of political history, but also about the success of police intimidation and the depths of repressed trauma, which they didn’t want to pass on to their children and nephews” (Jambrešić-Kirin 2009). The silence lasted for years even between close friends: former partisan and AFŽ leader Neda Božinović relates that one of her school friends, another former partisan, only told her twenty-five years later that she had been on Goli Otok. On her hand, though, Neda seemed to have already guessed what had happened: “We saw each other all the time, but avoided talking about Goli Otok. She avoided it and I avoided it...I did not ask (Stojaković, Jankov and Savić 2002: 31).<sup>69</sup>

Kuzmanović (1995: 60) made similar observations about the proliferation of male testimonies about Goli Otok, and about the silences of the prisoners’ wives. She recounts the case of Olga Hebrang, wife of Croatian communist leader Andrija Hebrang, one of the most notorious victims of the post-1948 repression: “The fate of Olga’s sec-

67 See the quotations from former inmates in Jambrešić-Kirin (2009).

68 According to the writer Abdulah Sidran, whose father was detained on Goli Otok, the survivors were forced to cooperate with the secret service once they had been released, or they would have lose their jobs, houses, or be sent back to the island. In this way the secret service was able to establish a network of thousands of collaborators (Sidran and Del Giudice 2009: 414-415).

69 This woman was later ‘rehabilitated’ thanks to Neda, who openly visited her with her husband, a member of the Party Central Committee, in 1953/1954. This was interpreted by the community as a symbolic ‘rehabilitation and allowed her friend to get a job afterwards. Still, she did not reveal to Neda what she had experienced on Goli Otok until the 1990s (Stojaković, Jankov and Savić 2002: 31).

ond husband became the subject of hot national debate in the late 1980s, and Olga became the center of media attention. If she had been born male, perhaps she would have written a book about her experiences. But being what she is, Olga gave a single interview, the central figure of which was her husband. That she had been a victim in her own right was of no interest.” Other women, whose husbands had been imprisoned, and who had suffered state harassment for decades, declined to be interviewed by Kuzmanović, since they did not see their sacrifices as worth remembering.

Sometimes the catastrophic Yugoslav wars of the 1990s convinced these women to speak out and so counter erasure and forgetting, as related by Eva Grlić (2005: 7): “After having already survived into my eighties, instead of the expected and deserved peace, I witnessed a terrible war falling upon Croatia and Bosnia-Herzegovina. When faced with an avalanche of new mass war tragedies, I started to subtract from forgetting, through these memoirs, that which we had lived through during and after the Second World War.” Still, Eva told her own story only decades after retiring from public and intellectual life, a life dedicated to her family, and notably to her husband, the influential philosopher Danko Grlić, whose career and intellectual engagements found an invaluable support in Eva’s talents.

In a remarkable essay contained in the anthology *Dom i Svijet* about the feminist interpretation of women’s writings on Goli Otok, Jambrešić-Kirin (2008) notes the scarcity of studies about the specific gendered experience of intra-communist political repression, and notably how in the prison camps new “egalitarian” conceptions of women’s roles were combined with long-standing misogynistic anxieties about the women “of the enemy”. The recently gained right to divorce, for instance, was used as a tool for state repression. Husbands were urged to divorce female detainees, and detainees’ parents pressured to break off any relations, if they wanted to avoid reprisals. The wives of political prisoners, too, were encouraged to break with their husbands, now “enemies of the state”; they were themselves sent to Goli Otok or permanently harassed, losing their apartments, their jobs, and facing public hostility. Many women detained on Goli Otok found themselves there merely because of family relationships, or by chance, and had no idea of what the Cominform was. Others were professors, journalists, party officers, or women who had had contact with foreign countries through their work or their husbands, and who had gained these positions thanks to the Resistance legacy and to postwar emancipation politics (see Grlić 2005: 155-156). The identities of female detainees are a testimony of political fears about ambitious women (“quality cadres”), but also of the ideological fear towards “conservative” women, who do not show unconditional loyalty to the state because of their familial, religious or ethnic attachments (Jambrešić-Kirin 2008: 85). According to Jambrešić-Kirin, therefore, the gendered experiences of Goli Otok show that the post-revolutionary emancipation politics implemented in the Yugoslav state had an instrumental component, and could not dispel long-standing patriarchal structures (2008: 84, 92).

Jambrešić-Kirin points to the fact that the “ceremonies of degradation” set up for female prisoners specifically targeted them as biological female beings, affecting their

reproductive capacities<sup>70</sup> and their gendered individualities (2008: 82). This included head shaving, group undressing and disinfections, being made to wear clothing and footwear of inappropriate size, obscene signs carried on the body, cleaning of toilets and the public “confession” of misdeeds (2008: 99). In a distorted socialist experiment, the tortures within the camp were entirely “self-managed”, in order to destroy any solidarity among the inmates and in order to create reciprocal hatred and guilt. Interrogations, confessions and the organization of labor were entirely managed by the detainees themselves, while the prison administration lived outside the camp. Within this system, “nobody could leave as if nothing had happened, without feelings of guilt.” Instead, all detainees “were forced to hate each other, accuse each other, beat each other, while the administration, housed in simple, decent buildings, in a different area of the coast, was far removed from these horrors” (Grlić 2005: 167-168). The feelings of guilt and fear accompanied the former inmates for the rest of their life. In this way the prisoners – the women prisoners in particular – “guarded for the longest time the best kept secret of Yugoslav ‘juridical independence’, the secret of Goli Otok” (Jambrešić-Kirin 2008: 81).

## 2.2. Enemy making: The AŽ and the UDB amidst Cold War struggles

As mentioned in the previous section, there are still few published memoirs of women’s experiences of post-1948 political repression and victimization, and they are rarely analyzed in political history. Similarly, few studies have dealt with the role of women’s organizations within Cold War intra-communist conflicts in Yugoslavia (Sklevicky 1989b; 1996; Jeraj 2005; Pantelić 2011).<sup>71</sup> In this section I adopt a transnational perspec-

70 Not only did the prisoners stop menstruating because of exhaustion and hunger (Grlić, 2005: 58), but some were convinced that this was an effect of poison in the prison food (Jambrešić-Kirin 2008: 90). According to the testimony of Slava K., a woman who had been detained on Goli Otok, none of the women detained there were able to have children afterwards, probably because of being poisoned: “Ja mrtva gladna, valjda su nam brom davali, tko zna što su nam davali u hrani. Samo cu ti reći : nijedna žena koja je bila na Golom Otoku nema djece. Znači, tu je nešto.” (I was starving, probably they gave us bromine, who knows what they put in the food. I will tell you only one thing: not one woman who has been to Goli Otok managed to have children. That means, there must have been something there.) Quoted in Dijanić et al. (2004: 145).

71 In her study of Slovenian women in socialist times, historian and archivist Mateja Jeraj dedicates some pages to the effects of the Cominform Resolution on the Slovenian chapter of the Antifascist Women’s Front (see Jeraj 2005: 211-219). She also tells the story of a woman detained on Goli Otok, Vilma Štendler-Zupan (born 1927), whom she interviewed in 2002. In her book on female partisans in Serbia, Ivana Pantelić dedicates a chapter to the lives of some partisan women who had been detained as political prisoners, on Goli Otok and Sveti Grgur, but also in other prisons all over the country (Ramski Rit, Zabela, Stolac, Lonjske Polje etc.); she also deals with the case of Marija Zelić, former UDBA officer and the main interrogator in Ramski Rit and Sveti Grgur, a woman who is remembered by all detainees for her fanaticism and fierceness, but who spoke of her tasks as interrogator with bureaucratic detachment, underlining

tive on these events, expanding my analysis to include the effect of the Cominform Resolution on women's organizations in Italy and the Italo-Yugoslav border area. A detailed study of this issue is beyond the scope of this dissertation, since it would require a thorough exploration of state and party archives, whereas I choose to limit the present research to the collections of the AFŽ, the UDI and the UDAIS, with the exception of some Italian Communist Party material housed at the Gramsci Institute in Rome. From the collections of the AFŽ, the UDI and the UDAIS, it is already clear, however, that women's organizations, in alliance with their respective communist parties, were active agents of these struggles and actively contributed to the production of Cold War discourses, which included the creation of internal and external enemies. This process, in turn, also greatly affected women militants. In this section I will give some examples of the way in which Cold War fears and mentalities permeated the life of women's organizations in Yugoslavia and Italy, while in the next section I will deal with the specific context of the Italo-Yugoslav border area.

As shown in the first part of this chapter, AFŽ leaders attempted to counter their international isolation resulting from the 1949 expulsion from the WIDF. During the war the AFŽ had mobilized women against Nazi-fascist enemies and collaborators, while in the postwar period women were encouraged to mobilize against class enemies, speculators and former collaborators, in order to strengthen the government (see Jeraj 2005). After 1948, as Sklevicky notes in her pioneering essay, "for the first time the stress was overtly on the ideological indoctrination of women" (1989b: 101) and the AFŽ was in charge of transmitting anti-Soviet party directives. The Yugoslav authorities called for mass mobilization against Information Bureau spies and conspirators, but also against those identified as "kulak"<sup>72</sup>, notably peasants who resisted the collectivization of land imposed by the Yugoslav state in the years 1949-1951. The collectivization was seen in fact by state authorities as a way to survive the economic blockade raised by the Soviet bloc.<sup>73</sup> It is not surprising, therefore, that a 1949 Resolution by the AFŽ Central Committee instructed militants on the neces-

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her engagement in the 're-education' of the prisoners (see Pantelić 2011: 105).

72 See Jeraj (2005: 207-211). Bokovoy (1998: 90) explains: "While the Soviets had tried to define, quantify, and clarify the different peasant groups during the 1920s, the KPP, by late 1947, finally settled on a broad philosophical definition of the kulak. For the KPP, "kulak" became interchangeable with "speculator", "enemy of the people", and "usurper" as a term for rich, exploitative elements. "Kulak" came to mean all that was obstreperous, recalcitrant, opportunistic, and obstructionist – anyone who prevented the Communists from accomplishing their goals in the countryside, regardless of what their material or social position might be. Kardelj said it best when he stated in November 1947, "The kulak is a political concept – a man who does not fulfill his obligation to the state." About the AFŽ and the construction of internal enemies before 1948, see Jeraj (2005: 189-211).

73 Bokovoy (1998: 135) quotes Ivo Banac on this point: "The anti-Cominformist purge was a unique opportunity for the KPP leadership to cleanse the land of all potential troublemakers." However, she adds, "in the countryside, it was not always clear who the troublemakers were. Trouble could be interpreted as simple recalcitrance or outright resistance to the otkup and the peasant work cooperatives. Both tendencies existed, and both were punished."



sity to “actively unmask those among women who are kulak, war-kulak and Inform Bureau spokespersons.”<sup>74</sup>

From another report presented during the Third AFŽ Plenum in June 1949, we get a sense of the violent climate prevailing in 1949, and we see that women at times actively took part in the production of violence. The delegate from Pula, Istria, declares that more must be done in the struggle against the Inform Bureau, and that “today every member of the Party, every member of the Liberation Front and every female member of the AFŽ has to immediately clarify his/her Inform Bureau activities.” She reports the discovery of a secretary of the AFŽ, who had pretended to separate from her husband “only to maintain her position”, while she in fact continued her relationship with him, and hid him at home: “As soon as it was found out she was thrown out and boycotted and sent to work, to wash laundry in a factory.” In Pula, she reports, the fight against supporters of Inform Bureau had intensified: “When two [male] supporters of IB spoke in the street against our Party, our women told them that they love the Party and hit the two IB supporters on the spot.”<sup>75</sup>

On the other hand, the majority of the AFŽ sources express concern about AFŽ members’ lack of interest in the Cominform issue (see also Jeraj 2005: 212). Another undated document, most probably from 1949, laments the indifference towards the struggle against the Cominform among AFŽ members, who see this issue as a “party issue” and not as an issue pertaining to the Antifascist Women’s Front. “Many of our organizations [sections] estimate that the struggle against the *Informbiro* can limit itself to a general declaration, since in the midst of these organizations there are no *Informbiro* supporters.” In the women’s press, the document continues, there are hardly any references to the issue, so that one could have the impression that “nothing has happened in the relation between the Soviet Union and our country.”

As pointed out by Jeraj (2005: 212), this “lack of interest” might also be interpreted as a sign of fear, and as a wise strategy to stay out of trouble, due to the sensitivity of the issue, and the great risk of getting arrested for no reason. As a woman relates in an interview, after 1948 people were advised to “keep silent, since even the walls have ears. So it was better if you kept silent” (quoted in Dijanić et al. 2004: 169). At the same time, many local AFŽ cadres probably could not decide on the proper stance to assume in this process, due to the continuous shifts in the relations between Yugoslavia and the Soviet Union. Furthermore, rumors, fears and anxieties about a possible

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74 Zagreb, Državni Arhiv, AFŽ-KDAŽ-HR-HDA 1234-5-k.58 “Sjednice, Plenumi, Sastanci, 1946-1959”: 801. “Resolucija o Narodnim Zadacima Trećeg Plenuma CO AFŽ Jugoslavije Održanog 4 i 5 Juna 1949 u Beogradu.” See also Sklevicky, 1996: 130-138 for a discussion of AFŽ role in the villages. See also Chapter 6.

75 Belgrade, Arhiv Jugoslavije, AFŽ collection, 141-6-15, 1025 : “Imamo primera organizacija AFŽ da se otkrila tajnicu AFŽ da se rastala od muža koji se izjasnio za Rezoluciju Informbiroa samo da se održi na položaju i koja je i dalje održavala sa njim veze i skrivala ga u kući. Čim se doznalo za to ona je izbacena i bojkotovana i poslata da radi, da pere veš u jednoj tvornici. Imamo u Puli slučaj zaoštrene borbe protiv informbirovaca. Kada su dva informbirovca govorila na ulici protiv naše Partije, nase žene su pokazale da vole Partiju i na licu mesta pretukle ova dva informbirovca.”

foreign invasion were spreading among women in 1949: some people waited for the British, while other expected the Russians to arrive. "People say that in such isolation we cannot resist for too long" (quoted in Jeraj 2005: 214).

The AFŽ federal leaders, therefore, feared that the mass of women could be an easy "prey" of the Inform-bureau slogans, notably the slogans casting doubt on the competence of the state, such as for instance the ideas that "the English, the Americans, or the Russians and the Hungarians will come", or that "socialism is being built too quickly, that we export too much" etc. These slogans could easily combine with "reactionary" statements from church members, and circulate among women.<sup>76</sup> AFŽ members in all the provincial sections were therefore entreated to counter the "passifying" of the feminine masses, and to mobilize them on this issue, by explaining the danger that *Informbiro* actions represented against "the construction of socialism in our country." The struggle against the Inform-Bureau had to become "an integral part of the consciousness of our citizens."<sup>77</sup> The AFŽ leaders had the task of "chang[ing] the opinion of some provincial councils that women in their sections are not interested to the Inform-Bureau Resolution; they have to actively build the consciousness of our working women." The document concluded by saying that "our power [the power of the country] resides not only in the righteousness of our positions towards the *Informbiro*, but also in the fact that many millions could support the struggle – if only everyone was aware of the impending threat."<sup>78</sup>

Across the border, the Italian PCI was also affected by increasing Cold War tensions, and by its gradual isolation after the 1948 April elections. On the 14<sup>th</sup> of July 1948, a young man of anti-communist persuasion shot PCI leader Palmiro Togliatti at the exit of Parliament. While he was in hospital in critical condition, mass strikes and armed insurrections of the workers erupted all over the country and were harshly repressed by the police. The climate seemed to prefigure the start of a civil war, with 30 dead and 800 injured; Togliatti was finally saved and called for moderation, managing to calm the situation. Yet in this tense climate PCI militants adopted a siege mentality, with neighborhood sections assuming "the same comprehensive role as the church in the everyday life of its members" (Urban 1986: 220) and with a strong reliance on the myth of the Soviet Union as a source of popular legitimacy. In this context, the PCI unavoidably joined – albeit in a "not always consequent" way – the Cominform campaign against "Titoism" (see Terzuolo 1985; Karlsen 2010). The PCI national press campaign against "Titoists" increased after the Second Cominform Resolution of November 1949, with a number of reports on the conditions of politi-

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76 Belgrade, Arhiv Jugoslavije, AFŽ fund, 141-6-537.

77 Belgrade, Arhiv Jugoslavije, AFŽ fund, 141-6-538.

78 Ibidem. "Svaki graditelj socijalizma danas kod nas mora da je sasvim na čisto sa pravo sadržinom i namerom informbirovske klevete, jer to danas mora biti sastavni deo svesti naših graditelja. Naša rukovodstva zbog toga moraju razbiti mišljenja nekih sreskih odbora koji javljaju da se žene u njihovom srezu ne interesuju za Rezoluciju Informbiroa, one moraju aktivno graditi svest naših radnih žena. Moć našeg stava nije samo u pravilnosti njegovoj, već i u činjenici da ima masovnu mnogomiljonsku podršku trudbenika naše zemlje, a ta podrška toliko je veća, ukoliko smo našim radom omogućili da svako zna za klevete."

cal repression and “terror” within Yugoslavia and in Zone B of the Free Territory of Trieste. *L’Unità* even reported on the fate of Italian political prisoners in Goli Otok as early as 1952 (Karlsen 2010: 214).

The struggle against “Titoists” took an internal character in Italy too: in 1951 the PCI expelled two prominent former partisans and PCI leaders from Emilia-Romagna, Valdo Magnani and Aldo Cucchi, and accused them of being “Titoist traitors”, because they expressed independent opinions about the relationship between the Soviet Union and workers’ movements in other countries (Terzuolo 1985: 139-143). Valdo Magnani, notably, who had fought in the Resistance in Yugoslavia, condemned in January 1951, during the local PCI Congress in Reggio Emilia, the fact that many Italian militants placed their hopes in a revolution brought by the Red Army. He petitioned for a democratic renewal that would draw on national, rather than international forces, and declared any invasion by a foreign army unacceptable, no matter which side it might come from. He was immediately expelled from the party as a “traitor” and isolated from political life. The testimony of Valdo Magnani’s second wife, journalist and writer Franca Schiavetti Magnani, whose antifascist parents and relatives refused to have any relationship with her husband for the next five years, affirms the painful fierceness of intra-communist divisions and makes the difficult status of leftist “heretical” thought in early Cold War times apparent (Magnani 1990).

The fear of “Titoist” heresy, be it internal or external, spread also to the Union of Italian Women, which between 1948 and 1953 was more than ever ‘embedded’ in Cold War struggles (see Chapter 6 for a discussion of the issue of *autonomy* of women’s organizations). Even though the UDI had severed all ties with the AFŽ after its expulsion from the WIDF, UDI magazine *Noi Donne* regularly published articles on “Tito’s terror” in Zone B of the Free Territory of Trieste, and relayed Cominform propaganda in its publications. Moreover, the UDI sent some messages of “greetings” to the Yugoslav women, for instance on the 8<sup>th</sup> of March 1950, when the UDI section of the city of Udine wished “the Yugoslav women who suffer under a fascist regime a forthcoming liberation, that would save them from being a tool of warmongering American imperialism.”<sup>79</sup>

But as in the case of the base of the AFŽ militants, issues of international politics seemed far removed from the everyday preoccupations of UDI intermediate cadres and rank-and-file members. This is made clear by the transcription of a 1950 meeting of the Women’s Commission of the Italian Communist Party, which gathered communist female cadres, including some leaders of the UDI.<sup>80</sup> Discussing how to better mobilize women in the midst of anti-communism and class-based repression, it was noted that not much had been done to popularize the Soviet campaign for “peace”. Elda Marsiglio from Padua (where party members comprised only 1 per cent of the female population) stated: “some women do not understand that the threat of war is real, others are passive, others fear that the war will come from the Soviet side.”<sup>81</sup> Lina

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79 Belgrade, Arhiv Jugoslavije, AFŽ fund, 141-24-118.

80 Rome, Istituto Gramsci, MF 233, fascicolo 17 – sezione femminile 1949-1950, Verbale della riunione della Commissione Femminile del 26-27 gennaio 1950.

81 Ibidem.

Fibbi, former partisan, communist and trade union leader lamented that very few provincial councils of the UDI had expressed interest in the WIDF Moscow Congress. She also pointed to the fact that the exclusion of the Yugoslav leaders and the Resolution of the Moscow Council had scarcely been debated.<sup>82</sup>

WIDF representative and UDI leader Maria Maddalena Rossi also complained that the “comrades had not studied the Moscow Resolutions”, and pointed to the risks of counter-propaganda coming from Yugoslavia: “What are the practical consequences, for instance, of the exclusion of the Yugoslav leaders? Are we worrying about sending back the material that is continually sent to our organizations from Yugoslavia?”<sup>83</sup> The need to reject the counter-propaganda from Yugoslavia was connected to the fear of possible internal dissidence. Another communist leader worried about the students of the *scuola quadri*, located in Milan. These schools trained a number of women from different social backgrounds to become local cadres and party leaders. Within the school, it was noted, “the need for vigilance is serious and must be examined: cases of Titoist deviation among women have not been signaled so far, but nonetheless we need to develop a more careful vigilance and a tighter control.”<sup>84</sup>

These debates among leaders show how Cold War fears and anxieties were propagated by women’s organizations, and how these organizations contributed to the creation of internal and external enemies. This allowed them to build group identity and internal cohesion, but also resulted in processes of political repression and exclusion. Internal polarizations within Italy caused by the Soviet-Yugoslav split seem to be confined to the leaders and the intermediate cadres of the party, while they only partially affected the militant base. In the Italo-Yugoslav border area, however, where ideological polarizations combined with ethnic and national tensions, the Cominform Resolution had very divisive consequences for the local leftist forces and for women’s organizations.

### 2.3. The effects of the Cominform Resolution in the Italo-Yugoslav border area

As made clear in the previous chapter, in the postwar era the Yugoslav model had been hegemonic among the leftist forces of the Italo-Yugoslav border area, notably in the contested city of Trieste under Allied administration, as well as in the harbor of Monfalcone, from which thousands of skilled workers of the shipyards migrated to

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82 Ibidem.

83 “Quali conseguenze pratiche, per esempio, ha nelle nostre organizzazioni femminili, il fatto che le dirigenti iugoslave siano state espulse dalla FDIF? Ci si preoccupa di respingere il materiale che dalla Jugoslavia viene continuamente inviato alle nostre organizzazioni?” Ibidem.

84 “La questione della vigilanza è seria e deve essere esaminata: non sono stati sinora segnalati casi di deviazione di carattere titista tra le donne, occorre però, comunque, sviluppare una più attenta vigilanza e un maggiore controllo.” Ibidem.

Yugoslavia in 1947.<sup>85</sup> In Trieste, from 1945 onwards, the leftist forces were constantly mobilized to campaign for Trieste as *Settima Federativa*, or Seventh Republic of the Yugoslav Federation, as a way to include the city in the socialist bloc guided by the Soviet Union. While for many Slovenes this implied a national choice, for many Italian workers, living in a land that has been “Italian” only since 1919, and heavily repressed during Fascism, this choice was determined by class and ideology.<sup>86</sup> Some Italian workers wished to be part of Yugoslavia because of their internationalist beliefs (which in Federal Yugoslavia would not contravene the Marxist doctrine of national self-determination).

Yet, over the years, the possibility of an annexation to Yugoslavia had practically vanished; while the campaign on this issue had failed, not much had been done on other impending issues, such as labor rights, housing prices and other pressing matters. Some of the Italian leaders of the local communist party, the PCTLT (previously PCRG), had grown exasperated with Slovene communist leaders’ attempts to dictate the agenda within the PCTLT according to Yugoslav and Slovene concerns, since this alienated the sympathies of the Italian workers, while deepening the rift between “Slavo-communism” and the anti-communism of the Italian middle classes.<sup>87</sup> The Resolution of June 1948, therefore, was received in a context already ridden with nationalist tensions, and added further divisions within the party and among the local leftist militants of different ethnic backgrounds, not only in Trieste but also in the rest of the Free Territory of Trieste. The leadership of the PCTLT met on the 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> of July, and after a heated debate the party leadership split between a majority of followers of the Cominform Resolution, led by Vittorio Vidali, and a minority of followers of the Yugoslav Communist Party, led by Branko Babić (Terzuolo 1985: 145).

The majority of Italian militants from Trieste and the Italo-Yugoslav border area accepted the 1948 Resolution<sup>88</sup>, and agreed with its allegations of “nationalism” on the part of the Yugoslav Communist Party, since they were already critical of the behavior of Yugoslav leaders towards the Italian minority. However, some of them recognized the allegations in the Second Resolution of 1949 – especially those which portrayed the Yugoslav government as a “gang of assassins and spies” – as exaggerated and unrealistic<sup>89</sup>, notably when they contradicted direct experiences of joint Resistance fight-

85 These workers were encouraged by the local PCI to move to Yugoslavia to “build socialism”, and from the beginning of 1947 around 2000 of them took the direction of Fiume/Rijeka, the harbor city on the other side of the (yet uncertain) border (see Berrini 2004).

86 Their image of the motherland, in fact, was “filtered through the uniforms of carabinieri, police and Fascists, a motherland that always considered us as Italians of second or third rank” (Berrini 2004: 45).

87 About the strategies of the PCTLT, see notably the 1947 report by Mario Pacor. Rome, Archivio Gramsci, MF 134, f. “Trieste e Pola”. See also Terzuolo (1985: 145-151), as well as Karlsen (2010).

88 In the administrative elections held in zone A in June 1949, “the Cominformists won 21.4 percent of the vote in Trieste, as opposed to 2.35 percent for the Titoists. The difference in Muglia was even more striking – 56.86 as opposed to 4.39 percent. Even in the more heavily Slovene comuni of zone A, the Cominformists always received a higher percentage” (Terzuolo 1985, 146).

89 See for instance the interview of Licia Chersovani, intervistatore Franco Giraldi, pp. 8-9, dattiloscritto Fondo Bonelli, IRSML Trieste.

ing.<sup>90</sup> While the Cominform side also gathered some Slovene support, the majority of Slovene militants of the Antifascist Italo-Slovene Union sided with Tito. A number of Slovene villages near Trieste sided with Vidali, while others sided with Babić. In this way “nationality remained a major dividing line within the Trieste working-class movement” (Terzuolo 1985: 148), and the ideological divides overlapped with previous national and ethnic divides.

The Italian communist militants who had immigrated to Yugoslavia, too, remained faithful to the Italian Communist Party and to the Soviet Union. The allegations against the Yugoslav leadership appeared to be a faithful portrayal of the dire material situation they experienced, while they continued to believe that living conditions in the Soviet bloc were idyllic, as reported by the Italian communist press (Bonelli 1994). Through 1949, the Cominformist campaign became fierce on both sides of the border. The leaders of the Trieste party, traditionally hard-liners and now freed from Yugoslav hegemony, acted as a Soviet outpost in the fight against Titoism. Popular communist leader Vittorio Vidali – a long-standing revolutionary with a personal connection to Moscow – became Cominform’s most prominent man in Trieste (Karlsen 2010; Bonelli 1994; Terzuolo 1985). In Zone B of the TLT and in Yugoslavia proper the political repression affected many Italian workers who had sided with the PCI. The majority of them managed to return to Italy, while some others, including a few who had been encouraged by the PCI and by the PCTLT to agitate against the Yugoslav government, were put on trial, and sentenced, and suffered many years in Goli Otok and in other prisons (Bonelli 1994; Scotti 1997).

Women were not spared from this intra-communist “war of religion”. As Silva Bon notes (2004: 49), in Trieste the Cominform split forced many women to “take sides” within the party and in their personal lives, often leading to the painful ending of important relationships and friendships: “these are years in which for many women even the ‘private is public’. Ideology conditions all their life experiences.” A number of Italian women who had migrated to Yugoslavia with their families were affected directly or indirectly by the political repression too.<sup>91</sup> The trauma of political repression, moreover, persisted through the years: many Istrian men who had been detained on Goli Otok were very violent towards their wives once they returned home.<sup>92</sup>

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90 A former partisan who had fought with the Yugoslavs stated: “It was a trauma for us all. Many among us never accepted this. How could I, for instance, accept such a thing after having collaborated with them for more than two years, seeing them dying in struggle in the way they died?” – (“Fu una cosa traumatica per tutti. Molti e molti tra di noi non abbiamo mai accettato una cosa come questa. Ma come potevo io, per esempio, accettare una cosa come questa se per più di due anni avevo collaborato con loro, li avevo visti in lotta morire come sono morti?”). Intervista con Mario Lizzero per il programma RAI Trieste nel ’48, dattiloscritto Fondo Bonelli, IRSML Trieste.

91 Eva Grlić remembers Licia Pipan, for instance, an Italian woman on Goli Otok (Grlić 2005; see also Scotti 1997).

92 As reported by professor Gloria Nemec, oral historian and scholar of gender relations, who has researched the lives of Italian exiles from Istria in the postwar period (personal conversation, Trieste, November 2010).

The violent ideological divides also affected women's organizing in Trieste, notably the UDAIS, the Union of Antifascist Italo-Slovene Women. On the 21<sup>st</sup> of July 1948, after a turbulent assembly attended by 500 women, in which a female comrade was even "mistreated and beaten", the majority of the association took a stance in favor of the Cominform Resolution.<sup>93</sup> On the 5<sup>th</sup> of August, the general council of UDAIS representatives from the Free Territory of Trieste expelled those women, mostly Slovenes, who still supported Tito.<sup>94</sup> From then until 1950, 'Cominformist' women continued to use the name "UDAIS"; in 1951, they adopted the name of *Unione Donne Democratiche* (UDD), and in 1954, when Trieste was assigned to Italy, they merged with the Union of Italian Women (UDI). For their part, the 'Titoist' women also tried to keep the name "UDAIS", but later renamed themselves as the women's section of the Union of Independent Socialists (*Unione Socialista Indipendente*, USI), a national party founded by former PCI dissidents Valdo Magnani and Aldo Cucchi, which in Trieste united the pro-Yugoslav left.<sup>95</sup>

Judging from the documents produced by the two sides in this period, the local conflict between "Titoist" and "Cominformist" leaders was heated. The two organizations were competing for the favor of the local "masses" of housewives and working women, through the organization of political campaigns, cultural and recreational activities, kindergartens and the like. Reading between the lines of official reports, it seems that women from the "base" were more occupied with their daily survival and less with ideological discussions. The top-down attempt to mobilize the "passive" masses was a constant concern of the leaders. In March 1950, the pro-Titoist UDAIS organized a Congress, and reported that the pro-Cominform UDAIS attempted to disrupt it, but were unable to mobilize their "mass". Mass is written in inverted commas in the original document, to distinguish between real and false mass support: "We should not forget that we are the true representatives of UDAIS, and as such we should penetrate among the passive mass, explaining to them how to struggle for the rights of the working class people."<sup>96</sup> A similar language is used in a document of the UDD, which reports that "Titoist women" attempted to "pacify" the activists, while they build consensus among women by "visiting each house, and knowing from the

93 Ljubljana, Archiv Republike Slovenije, AS 1576, k.3, 2C, "Relazione politico-organizzativa delle compagne responsabili dell'UDAIS" (December 1948).

94 Ibidem.

95 Due to the quick changes of political denominations and to the fragmentation of sources, I formulate this interpretation on the basis of cross-checked documents collected in Ljubljana and Trieste. While the documents of the pro-Cominform UDAIS – later UDD – are conserved mainly in Trieste, the documents of the pro-Tito UDAIS – later USI – are held principally in Ljubljana. The documents of the two organizations are more or less evenly distributed according to their political orientation.

96 "Non dobbiamo dimenticare che noi siamo le vere e proprie rappresentanti del Udais e come tali dobbiamo penetrare fra la massa passiva, spiegando a questa come bisogna lottare per i diritti del popolo lavoratore..." Ljubljana, Archiv Republike Slovenije, AS 1576, k.3, 2E, report 7.3.50 (CR III Rione, Trieste).

information gained from activists at the base the problems, the difficulties, the weaknesses of each family, to whom they attempt to get closer by promising help.”<sup>97</sup>

UDAIŠ leaders and intermediate members engaged in a number of grassroots activities at the local level, which were heavily conditioned by the post-Resolution climate. Its leaders were also involved in transnational activism: in 1948-49 Laura Weiss, Marija Bernetić and other UDAIŠ leaders attended the WIDF Congresses in Budapest and Moscow. They did not mention the local strife, but actively engaged in the Cominformist campaign by supporting the exclusion of the Yugoslav representatives from the WIDF. The figure of “professional revolutionary” Marija Bernetić is, in this sense, particularly interesting. Together with Vittorio Vidali, she had a very prominent role in anti-Tito activities, not only through the UDAIŠ and the WIDF, but also through the organizing of secret Cominformist activities within Yugoslavia proper (Bonelli 1994). In the mid-1950s, after the Soviet-Yugoslav reconciliation, she allegedly contributed to the destruction of files on the Italian Cominformists, which had become by then a source of embarrassment for the Italian Communist Party (Scotti 1997; Bonelli 1994; see Chapter 7). These examples seem to indicate that a separation between “women’s” and “communist” agendas is misleading, as is the vision of “communist women” as naive and manipulated. Instead, we need more studies on women’s different political loyalties, and on the different roles they played within Cold War intra-communist conflicts, notably when they occupied a leadership position.

## Conclusion

In this chapter – based on a combination of sources from different archives located in Belgrade, Zagreb, Ljubljana, Trieste, and Rome – I have dealt with the historical and geopolitical consequences of the Soviet-Yugoslav split of 1948-1949, focusing on its impact on Yugoslav, Italian and Italo-Slovene women’s organizations. I have analyzed the production of Cold War discourses and its effects on women’s organizing, but also the ways in which women’s organizations were themselves producers and propagators of Cold War discourses and worldviews. Political processes of exclusion, othering and enemy-making were an intrinsic part of the early Cold War period. Women were both engaged in these political processes, and dramatically affected by them. While the WIDF excluded and discriminated against the representatives of the AFŽ, in compliance with the Cominform Resolution excluding Yugoslavia from the Soviet bloc, UDI leaders participated in the Cominform campaign, by approving the decision of WIDF. The Yugoslav AFŽ, however, was later involved in the creation and repression of internal dissidents, the so-called *ibeovci*, or “Cominformists”. The UDAIŠ in Trieste was also split along ideological and ethnic lines.

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97 “Una non indifferente attività individuale svolgono le titiste portandosi di casa in casa, e conoscendo attraverso le informazioni delle loro attiviste della base, i problemi, le difficoltà, le debolezze di ogni famiglia, cercano di attirarle promettendo loro aiuti.” Narodna in Studijska Knjižnica, Trieste, fond ASIZZ-UDAIŠ, report UDD 6.1.51, Trieste, “Dalla Relazione dell’Unione Donne Democratiche. Attività titista.”



In this chapter, I have once more paid attention to the different positions of the women affiliated to these organizations, looking at the leaders and at the intermediate cadres, but also at the subjectivities and voices of the “masses” – as they were constructed by leaders and intermediate cadres in their documents. As militants of Marxist organizations, UDI, AFŽ and UDAIS leaders were keen to work for the consensus of the “masses”, which would serve as a source of power and legitimation. On the other hand, in times of social fear and paranoia about external and internal enemies, the most “organized” women often perceived the “masses” as passive, indifferent, or potentially reactionary, and attempted to establish tighter control. In the lack of interest or “drifting” of the feminine masses one can read a number of feelings and strategies, such as fear of war, everyday survival, as well as resistance to top-down political directives and state control.

A major difference between the UDI and the AFŽ, from now on, is the fact that the AFŽ became fully integrated in the state apparatus of the Yugoslav socialist regime after 1948. According to Lydia Sklevicky, “the total integration of the emancipatory process into the ‘ideological apparatus of the state’ meant that emancipation became something ‘practiced’ on women, as inarticulate objects of the social-political process, instead of making them its legitimate subject” (1989b: 105). Yet, even when perceived as objects rather than subjects of social change, the “feminine masses” could express their agency, for instance by refusing to get drawn into the intra-communist “war of religion” caused by the Soviet-Yugoslav split, and in the enmity it produced.

Women also participated in the making of internal enemies, with discursive and material consequences. In these early Cold War years many antifascist women were put on trial as enemies of the state: a case in point is Slovene antifascist Angela Vode, whose trial was approved of by the leadership of the AFŽ.<sup>98</sup> In the Soviet satellite states the show trials of the late 1940s and early 1950s caused many victims, among whom a former WIDF representative, Czech female politician Milada Horakova, who was executed in 1950.<sup>99</sup>

This chapter further demonstrates that Yugoslav and Italian women’s antifascist organizations played an important role in Cold War political struggles and divides, and that the subjectivities of AFŽ, UDI and UDAIS members depended on a number of

98 Angela Vode (1892 – 1985) was a Slovenian pedagogue, feminist writer and antifascist activist. She joined the illegal communist party before the war, from which she was later expelled for having criticized the Molotov-Ribbentrop pact in 1939. She later joined the Liberation Front and spent many months in the Nazi camp Ravensbruck. She survived and continued her life as a teacher in Slovenia. In 1947, she was arrested and tortured by the Yugoslav secret police, and put on trial with other politicians during the so-called 1948 ‘Dachau trials’ – the detainees were in fact survivors of Dachau, and accused of cooperation with the Nazis (Banac 1988: 20). She was jailed for six years and lived the rest of her life without political rights. Her secret memoir was published in Slovenia in 2004. Lydia Sklevicky notes that the leadership of the AFŽ in 1948 congratulated the security services for the successful persecution of “Hitlerite war perpetrators and imperialist agents...”, including Angela Vode (1996 : 133-134).

99 See Watkins (2010) and Feinberg (2009). Feinberg argues that in the socialist bloc the unilateral propaganda and the mobilisation of societal fear through the show trials convinced a number of citizens to partipate in state repression, for fear of themselves being repressed.

local, national and international factors, with important differences between the leadership and the rank-and-file members. In the previous chapter I showed that women's antifascist organizations created important connections between East and West during the Cold War, and that through these organizations discourses about women's emancipation, as well as discourses on class justice and anti-colonial discourses circulated across borders.

This chapter, on the other hand, focuses more on the limits, the ambiguities and the complexity of Cold War international 'sisterhood'. When it came to international relations in the early Cold War period, both Italian and Yugoslav women's organizations followed the lines of their respective communist parties, while the WIDF aligned itself with the Soviet stance on the expulsion of Yugoslavia. At the same time, the wide-ranging impact of the Cominform Resolution, and its domino effect on international, national and local levels, proves the richness of connections and the interdependency of internationalist women's organizing that existed in 1948, at least between Italy, Yugoslavia and the Italo-Yugoslav border area. This interdependency justifies a transnational approach: the stories contained in this chapter could simply not be written by taking only one national viewpoint. A transnational perspective allowed me to show the multiplicity of viewpoints, and, at the same time, the similarities between the AFŽ, the UDI and the UDAIS in terms of organizational structure and production of Cold War discourses.

While the UDI, the AFŽ and the UDAIS were crucial in promoting women's rights and women's activism at the national and local levels, they maintained a hierarchical, top-down structure that was typical of the "democratic centralism" of the communist left in Europe during the Cold War period. From 1948 onwards, the differences between the UDI and the AFŽ increased. While the UDI remained an oppositional left-wing organization within a capitalist country, the AFŽ became integrated into the state apparatus within a socialist country led by an authoritarian government (notably in the years 1948-1953). This major difference in political context determined the dissolution of the AFŽ in 1953. The UDI, instead, became a vital, relatively autonomous organization from the mid-1950s – and so did the UDD, which merged with the UDI in 1954, when Trieste was definitively assigned to the Italian state.

This chapter addressed the effects of the Cominform Resolution of 1948 on women's organizations in Italy, Yugoslavia and the Italo-Yugoslav border area. In the next chapter I shall address another theme that has widely been debated by feminist historians in Italy and Yugoslavia: the margins of autonomy of women's organizations vis-à-vis their respective communist parties, and the intersection between class-based and gender-based activism in the early Cold War period.

## Chapter 6

### Into the field: the AFŽ, the UDI and the practice of emancipation

#### Introduction

In 1947 a Party directive arrived, about convincing the most influential people in the city of the necessity for women to take off their veils (...) My father was present in the first of those meetings, and immediately made a decision: his daughter was going to take off the veil. Of course, he did not ask my opinion. My father's decision seemed to me the most horrible punishment. I was shocked, stunned, with no force to oppose him when he told me that he had given his word to the local Party committee. I cried all night. I was seventeen. I wanted to get married and I did not want to be different from other girls of my age.  
(Didara Dukadini in Malešević 2004: 39)

In 1947 Didara Dukadini, a seventeen-year-old Albanian girl raised in a wealthy family in the town of Prizren, was told by her father that she had to abandon her *feredže*, the full Islamic veil that covered her head and face when she ventured outside the house. The local communist authorities had invited the most important families in town to set the example, in order to establish the new socialist values in the traditional and underdeveloped region of Kosovo. Didara was shocked by her father's decision. She thought she could not survive the shame of going out "naked" in the streets. Upon deciding that she had to take off the veil, her father also decided that she would enroll in a teachers' training course. Three months later, Didara obtained employment as a teacher, since for the literacy campaign, literate workers who could teach in the different villages of Kosovo were in great demand.

Two years later, at age nineteen, Didara fell in love and was asked in marriage by a Serbian communist militant, Toša: "Communist from head to toe, he did not care at all about the difference in our national backgrounds" (Malešević 2004: 47). In order to marry the man she loved, and in order to avoid an arranged marriage with an Albanian man, Didara had to escape from her father's house, breaking off the relationship with her parents for several years to come. She later became a member of the AFŽ: as a "living example" of women's emancipation, she was sent to different villages to recruit other Albanian women for the activities of the Popular Front. While the case of Didara is exceptional, it is also an illustration of the extraordinary social and political transformations taking place in Yugoslavia's former Ottoman regions in

the immediate postwar period, and of the implications they had for women with a Muslim background.

This chapter deals with the national and local activities of the AFŽ and of the UDI in the period from 1948 to 1953. In the previous chapter I have highlighted the way in which women's organizations in Italy and Yugoslavia coped with increasing Cold War tensions on a national and international level. In this chapter I look at the way in which UDI and AFŽ leaders attempted to formulate and offer solutions to the different everyday needs of the majority of women living in their respective countries, targeting in particular poverty, illiteracy and underdevelopment in the countryside. I also look at the organizational debates about the possible forms that their "work among women" could take, and notably at the discussions about the need to maintain or abandon separate women's organizations.

The early Cold War period has been read by feminist historians as a general moment of "return to order", that is, a moment in which traditional gender roles were re-established after the disruption created by women's participation in the Resistance. According to feminist interpretations of women's history in Italy and the former Yugoslavia, the (partial) autonomy gained by women's organizations during the Resistance was gradually lost because of a general postwar conservative backlash, but also because of the primacy of Cold War geopolitical divides and ideological battles (Sklevicky 1996; Božinović 1996; Michetti, Repetto and Viviani 1998; Rodano 2010; Casalini 2005). The concept of *autonomy* used by feminist historians stands here for gender-based women's organizing, as opposed to class- and broader geopolitical interests.

In this chapter I challenge these interpretations, showing that the concept of women's *autonomy* is far from being universal, and does not have the same significance in all times and locations. As I have argued in Chapter 1, an epistemology based on the idea of autonomy emerged in Italy and Yugoslavia with second wave feminism, and is located within specific historical, political and economic processes. When the concept of autonomy is used as a static theoretical category, and when women's collective and individual autonomy from political institutions is taken as the prerequisite for effective activism, we risk limiting and oversimplifying our historical understanding.

This is the case when the ideal of women's autonomy is applied to the antifascist women's organizations of the Cold War period. The AFŽ and the UDI, as already discussed in Chapters 2 and 3, did not come into existence as "autonomous", but rather as part of the Liberation Front led by communist party elites in Yugoslavia and Italy. From the beginning, they were engaged in the fight against Nazi-fascism, war, poverty, and class inequalities, as well as working for women's political, economic and social rights. This does not mean, as I have already noted, that these organizations should be seen exclusively as "transmission belts" of their respective parties. Rather, their leaders had to negotiate between their loyalty to party and state politics and their engagement in women's issues. In this chapter I propose a multi-layered analysis of women's political agency in the Cold War period, looking at the activities of the UDI and the AFŽ between 1948 and 1953.

First I analyze how the UDI and the AFŽ strived to enforce a program of emancipation and modernization, targeting in particular rural, underdeveloped or war-torn contexts where women lived in extremely destitute and patriarchal conditions. I address some of the nation-wide and regional campaigns implemented by the AFŽ, such as the campaign against infant mortality, the action in the less developed districts of Yugoslavia against the full Islamic veil, and the campaign to ameliorate living and hygienic standards in the region of Kosovo. I also look at how the UDI demanded better wages and welfare provisions for female workers, engaged in the battle for the rights of landless peasants in the South of Italy, and attempted to support women who had been victims of war rapes in Central Italy. With these campaigns AFŽ and UDI leaders were trying to extend the new Constitutional and welfare rights “into the field”, to masses of women who had no awareness of their recently acquired right to take part in political decisions.

Feminist historians have criticized the tendency of antifascist women’s organizations to focus on equality in the public sphere, while neglecting issues of sexuality and of the gendered division of labor. UDI and AFŽ field reports show, however, how painstakingly difficult it was to dismantle long-standing women’s inferior position on the material and cultural level and to promote women’s right of access to the public sphere as equal citizens, students and workers. UDI and AFŽ activists perceived themselves as an avant-garde due to their participation to the antifascist Resistance, their education and their self-realization as political subjects. They attempted to extend their egalitarian experiences and political consciousness to other women, through meetings, campaigns and grassroots mobilizations. At the same time, AFŽ and UDI militants also recognized that the “feminine masses” often had different needs and interests that had to be taken into account, and they provided support on the level of everyday needs, knowing that the social transformation of family relations and of women’s status would be a “long and tiring work”.

The documents I have collected here show that UDI and AFŽ militants were not blind to violence against women in the private sphere, or to the sexual division of labor that existed at all levels, even among “comrades”. UDI and AFŽ activists had to face the hostility of male party members, particularly at the local level. During these campaigns UDI and AFŽ militants realized that, while suffering from class oppression or poverty together with men, women were doubly exploited on the basis of their sex in the sphere of productive and reproductive labor. They saw that long-standing patriarchal traditions and violence against women represented a major structural phenomenon, which also had to do with culture and which could not be solved through legislative measures or economic development only. At the same time, on the basis of their Marxist beliefs they were convinced that any form of progressive social change – including women’s emancipation – could only be achieved collectively, via the long and strenuous work of mass-based politicization, education, and economic redistribution involving both men and women.

Despite their similarities in their structure and in their avant-gardist and class-based approach towards women, after 1947-1948 the two organizations differed completely in their relationship to communist party politics and state power. While the

UDI – together with the PCI – was placed at the opposition of Italian mainstream politics, and had to strive for survival in the midst of harsh anti-communist campaigns and state repression of workers' struggles, in Yugoslavia the AFŽ – and notably its leaders – were completely integrated in the communist state apparatus, particularly after the internal repression that followed the Cominform crisis. On the other hand, after the break with the Soviet Union, the Yugoslav elites promoted a new political system based on geographical decentralization and self-management through workers' collectives. A vertical, hierarchical organization such as the AFŽ no longer corresponded to the main party line, and this led to the decision for the organization to dissolve itself and to decentralize the "work among women" within the respective local, regional and republican councils.

The "self-dissolution" of the Antifascist Women's Front of Yugoslavia in 1953 has been seen as a sign of socialist "state patriarchy" and male control over women's autonomous organizing (Sklevicky 1996; Stojaković, Jankov and Savić 2002). In this chapter I contend that we need a more complex and nuanced interpretation of this event, one that acknowledges the different levels of decision-making, the different strategic options that existed in 1953 Yugoslavia, as well as the position of female leaders and of rank-and-file members within and outside party politics.

## 1. The AFŽ in the early Cold War era

### 1.1. AFŽ campaigns in 1948–1953: women's equality as a modernization project

As shown in Chapter 5, the 1948–1949 Cominform crisis forced the AFŽ to engage more intensively in *agit-prop* activities in support of the Yugoslav government, and as a result of political repression and uncertainty, many rank-and-file militants abandoned the organization in the late 1940s.<sup>1</sup> The AFŽ work for the amelioration of women's living standards, however, did not cease in the early Cold War period, but rather continued in new ways and with new goals, notably women's entry into the labor market as a way to meet the requirements of the Five Year Plan (Lilly 2001: 66). In this section I shall describe AFŽ campaigns of "emancipation from above" in the early Cold War period, showing their pedagogic approach, but also the engagement for women's rights manifested by AFŽ activists, and the impact of these campaigns on women's everyday lives in the rural and underdeveloped areas of the country.

Despite the fact that women's juridical, economic and social rights had been inscribed in the new Yugoslav Constitution, AFŽ militants were immediately confronted with the gap that existed between these rights and women's everyday lives. The reports written by AFŽ local sections in the late 1940s and early 1950s testify to

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1 This is indicated by a number of reports on the *politička pasivizacija* (becoming politically passive) of women. According to historian Lydia Sklevicky in the years 1948–1950 "the total integration of the emancipatory process into the 'ideological apparatus of the state' meant that emancipation became something 'practiced' on women, as inarticulate objects of the social-political process, instead of making them its legitimate subject" (1989b: 105).

the extent and the degree of patriarchal domination, physical exploitation and lack of education in which the majority of women lived, notably in the countryside, and to the scarcity of resources of which the organization disposed in its fight against these phenomena. AFŽ activists describe the majority of women as over-exploited in their domestic, agricultural and industrial work. Women's labor is undervalued and treated as less worthy, but is in fact the core factor of household production.

A report from Croatia prepared for the 1953 AFŽ Congress denounces the fact that in the countryside a number of heavy agricultural tasks are considered "women's work" (*ženska posla*). Women carry on their backs all kinds of heavy material, like wood, water and wheat. In certain villages, in poor weather the cattle are given more consideration than the women, who are forced to carry water and wood in the rain. The author states that "from all this it is evident that women as an economic factor produce a lot and with their work contribute to a much higher extent to the household income than men, because women produce throughout the year and have no rest. Women's rights in the household are very limited and in some cases are less than those of ancient servants."<sup>2</sup> Women's living standards are low not only in the countryside, but also in urban areas. A 1953 report on women working in factories in Zagreb stressed that women's labor was considered less productive in the working collectives, and that women were the first to be fired. Because of their precarious conditions, female workers did not make use of their health and maternity rights for fear of losing their jobs. The report also listed other problematic issues, such as unwanted pregnancies and pregnancies out of wedlock.<sup>3</sup>

The 1953 AFŽ reports about the different republics present a number of similarities with regard to describing women's inferior position in society. The socialist revolution could not dispel traditional customs, popular religious practice, or traditional ideas about women's roles in private and public life. A number of religious and pagan rituals persisted, notably ritual and magic practices against the 'evil eye' striking pregnant women, infertile women, and newborns. AFŽ activists painstakingly compile lists of these rituals and practices for each village, denouncing them and treating them as a sign of backwardness, religiosity and ignorance. They constantly denounce the "wrong", "backward", "primitive" opinion on women's position in society, an opinion held by men but also by women themselves, who resist social change and have interiorized their inferior position as normal.

Another report about village life in the republic of Macedonia, states that women are not aware of having obtained new rights with the revolution. What they know, says the author, is that "a woman has only to work and to listen [obey]."<sup>4</sup> Across ethnic

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2 Belgrade, Arhiv Jugoslavije, AFŽ fund, 141-4-154. "Iz svega ovoga vidi se, da žena kao ekonomski faktor mnogo privređuje i sa svojim radom doprinosi mnogo veće prihode u domaćinstvu nego sam muškarac, jer žena privređuje kroz čitavu godinu i nema odmora. Međutim, prava žene u domaćinstvu su vrlo ograničena, a u pojedinim slučajevima manja nego što je imao nekadašnji sluga."

3 Belgrade, Arhiv Jugoslavije, AFŽ fund, 141-4-166.

4 "One znaju samo to da žena treba da radi i da sluša." Belgrade, Arhiv Jugoslavije, AFŽ fund, 141-4-206.

groups, men's violence against women is seen as normal, and many women are sold for marriage or bought as a labor force for the patriarchal household. According to the author, it is necessary for men and women to realize that "a woman is a human being, like the man, and as such she deserves dignity like any other human being."<sup>5</sup>

Between 1948 and the early 1950s, the main task of the AFŽ was the "enlightenment" (*prosvetivanje*) of peasant women. Five years after the end of the war, in a response to a 1950 UN questionnaire, the organization described its main activities as follows:

In collaboration with the other organizations and leading a widespread political activity, the AWF [AFŽ] is mainly embracing the most backward and passive masses of women. This organization is devoting a general attention to the educational work among women especially in view of developing their political conscience, raising their cultural level, etc. The AWF [AFŽ] organizes and helps a whole system of aid to the working woman and mother and performs this in the closest cooperation with the People's Committees and public health bodies, with trade unions, the Red Cross, by means of maternity-homes, medical consultations, ambulances, creches, playgrounds, harvest-time nurseries, kindergartens, also by improving housekeeping methods in order to facilitate living conditions for women, by opening restaurants, school-canteens, laundry-houses, reading-rooms, etc., and by lending individual help to mothers and children. So women should be enabled to take a greater part in the activities of economic and political life.<sup>6</sup>

In the late 1940s the organization targeted in particular "the most backward and passive masses of women", and saw itself as the institutional body in charge of the modernization of women's lives, notably in the countryside and in the rural areas, which constituted the majority of households in the Yugoslav Federation. In fact, in a number of speeches, AFŽ leader Vida Tomšić reasserted the idea proposed by Fourier, and popularized by Marx, according to which the condition of women in a society gives the measure of the development and civilization of that same society. The persistence of patriarchal and "backward" households in the rural areas, and particularly in the southern regions of Macedonia, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Kosovo and Metohija, was seen as an obstacle to the modernization of the country and to its socialist achievements.

In the next section I will address the way in which the AFŽ targeted "backwardness" in the regions of Kosovo and Metohija, and the way in which Muslim women living in Bosnia, Macedonia and Kosovo came to be seen as the most oppressed subjects, in need of being saved and enlightened by their emancipated Slovenian, Croatian and Serbian sisters living in the more advanced republics. Despite their top-

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5 "Ovi primeri govore koliko je nužno da muškarac, pa i sama žena na selu shvate da je žena čovek kao i muškarac i da kao takva i ona zaslužuje poštovanje kao i svaki drugi čovek" Belgrade, Arhiv Jugoslavije, AFŽ fund, 141-4-206.

6 "Replies to questionnaire concerning organisations of women and youth in the countryside", Belgrade, Arhiv Jugoslavije, AFŽ fund, 141-20-137;138.



down, pedagogic character, these campaigns ameliorated women's everyday lives on an unprecedented scale, and offered to some rural women the possibility of study, employment, access to the public space and a negotiated position within the family, thanks to the support of state authorities.

### 1.2. From darkness to enlightenment: the campaign against *feredže*

Already in the Kingdom of Yugoslavia in the interwar period, Serbian, Croatian and Slovene elites tended to look at the regions which had for a longer time been dominated by the Ottoman Empire – the republics of Bosnia-Herzegovina, Macedonia, and the regions of Kosovo and Metohija – as the most backward and underdeveloped areas, notably because of the diffusion of Islam. The existence of a consistent Slavic-speaking population who had converted to Islam was seen as an unwanted legacy of the Turkish occupation. Orientalist conceptions about Islam were interiorized by communist elites, who also looked upon these populations for reasons of political loyalty. Since the Slavic-speaking Muslim population of Bosnia and the Albanian-speaking population of Kosovo, Macedonia and Montenegro participated only marginally in the antifascist Resistance, moreover, the mark of civic backwardness was coupled with a mark of political backwardness. This was notably the case for the Albanian minority in Kosovo: the project of an Albanian-Yugoslav Federation was halted by the Cominform resolution of 1948, and Kosovo Albanians were perceived as a potential “fifth column” of Stalinist Albania.

These elements have to be taken into account when considering the campaigns carried out by communist authorities and AFŽ sections between 1947 and 1951. The campaign against the full veil or *feredže*, which covered the whole body and face, ran from 1946 until the early 1950s, when the different republics approved a number of laws forbidding the full veil. This wasn't a new idea: Serbian and Croatian feminist women's organizations had already written about the need to “liberate” their Muslim sisters from the slavery of the veil in the first half of the twentieth century (Giomi 2011). After the war, this project was first backed to a certain extent by state authorities, and by local sections of the Popular Front. The AFŽ activists of Muslim background were engaged in the campaign too, but it is hard to assess the role they played, since they were more commonly portrayed as “sisters in need” than as active subjects in the official AFŽ publications.

The AFŽ campaign against the *feredže* was marked by a far-reaching faith in humanism and historical progress, and by a strong ideal of socialist modernization, of which women's emancipation was seen as an intrinsic component. A report published in the journal *Žena Danas* in March 1951, recounts the journey of 400 Muslim men and women from Macedonia to Belgrade, Zagreb, Ljubljana and the seaside. The article is significantly titled “The first excursion of unveiled faces.” For many participants, this is their first departure from their native village, and among them are many women who have abandoned their veil. Marija Marinčić writes in particular about a young Turkish woman, Azbija, who has taken off the veil and has learned her first few words

in Macedonian: "The veil, I took off the veil." Maria continues, describing Azbija: "She [Azbija] looked at me. In that moment I felt that all that was old in her had died, that she felt as free as I did. In her gaze there was warmth and a great joy: – I used to live like a beast (*životinja*), now I know that I am a human being (*čovek*)."<sup>7</sup>

Metaphors of light and darkness, progress and backwardness, modernity and tradition, humanity and inhumanity were perpetually used in agit-prop publications designed to convince women of the benefits of taking off the veil. In an illustration shown at a public exhibition in Zagreb in 1949, veiled women were literally portrayed as coming out of the darkness, and entering the light, as they abandoned the *feredže*. The entry into public space was symbolized by images of women working and studying, their faces uncovered. The traditional scarf covering the hair, worn by Christian and Muslim peasant women alike, was seen instead as completely acceptable, since it did not prevent women from taking part in educational and work activities.

A cover of *Žena Danas* in 1951 portrayed a woman whose head and mouth was covered with a black veil, captioned: "No veil on the face, no darkness in the spirit."<sup>8</sup> The last page of the journal, by contrast, carried an article on the latest clothes fashions, showing a range of urban, Westernized dresses. This made clear the ideal of modern Westernized femininity shared by the editors of the AFŽ press. Since the break with the Soviet Union, Yugoslavia had become more open to Western trends. Thus the new form of humanist socialism also included a shift in femininity paradigms. Vida Tomšić in fact stated in 1948 that real socialism

will mean happiness, not the form of socialism that is promoted today by the Soviet Union, a grey bureaucratic socialism, which means the uniformity of the entire life, the omnipotence of the bureaucracy, and not the people's government (...) In the Russian newspaper we see how women there are badly dressed, as some sort of socialist necessity. This negates all that we are looking for – beauty, joy and diversity. We should teach women how to dress well, how to tidy up their apartment and how to do that quickly.<sup>9</sup>

According to Zagreb feminist historian Lydia Sklevicky, the increasingly depoliticized stance of the feminine press is apparent from 1950 onwards. Political articles and serious themes were replaced with articles on "family, housekeeping, fashion, popular medicine, entertainment, cultural life, etc.", so that "the image of the ascetic combat-

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7 "Feredžo, pusto feredžo": "Pogledala me je. U tom trenutku osetila sam da je u njoj sve staro umrlo, da se i ona oseća slobodna kao i ja. U njenom pogledu bilo je topline i mnogo sreće: – Živela sam kao životinja, sada znam da sam čovek." (p.9) "Otkrivenih Lica Na Prvom Izletu", *Žena Danas* n. 82, 1951.

8 "Bez zara na licu, bez mraka u duši", *Žena Danas* n. 81, 1951.

9 "Znači, socijalizam koji će značiti sreću, a ne koji će biti onakav kakvim ga danas proglašuju za uzor socijalizma u SSSR, sivi birokratski socijalizam, koji zapravo znači ukalupijavanje čitavog života, koji znači svest vlast birokracije, a ne vlast naroda (...) Mi vidimo po ruškim novinama kako su tamo sve žene ružno odjevene, i to kao neka potreba socijalizma, sve sto negira ono sto mi tražimo – ljepotu, veselje i raznolikost. Treba učiti žene da se znaju lijepo odijevati i pospremiti svoj stan i da to znaju brzo uraditi" (quoted in Sklevicky 1996: 134).

ant-cum-worker-cum-political activist was gradually and silently being abandoned” (1989b: 104). To read these changes solely as a form of patriarchal backlash, however, would be misleading. As illustrated in the above quotation, the figure of the “modern socialist city woman” promoted by the AFŽ press in the late 1940s and early 1950s embodied a dream of modern and emancipated femininity, opposed to the traditional model of servile femininity associated with peasant life. The AFŽ press also reflected the subjective position of AFŽ militants themselves, and the way in which they saw other women as sisters in need.

The idea of an enlightening mission against backwardness undertaken by progressive female experts also characterized the 1951 campaign for house sanitation in the Kosmet region. This was part of an overall effort to decrease the very high rates of infant mortality all over Yugoslavia. A team of AFŽ activists accompanied by a number of midwives and nurses toured the different villages of the region for six months. Here’s a description of the campaign in a French brochure about the conditions of women in Yugoslavia:

At the end of April 1951, the first team of women members of the Antifascist Front and the first team of the Red Cross made up of women from the most progressive centers of Yugoslavia (Ljubljana, Zagreb, Belgrade and Novi Sad) took the route of Kosovo to offer help to women, mothers and children and to teach them personal hygiene, childcare (food and care for infants and children), and household management. In addition to the members of the Antifascist Front of Women and of the Red Cross, these teams were comprised of medical personnel (doctors, midwives, dental hygienist and nurses) and members of mass organizations and experts in agronomy.<sup>10</sup>

The AFŽ activists and nurses taught rural women basic hygiene, how to cook, how to feed children in a healthy way, how to arrange the house in the most hygienic manner, describing the exact gestures and actions so that they could learn by imitation. Educational films and exhibitions were also employed. In a discussion of this campaign at the central levels of the AFŽ, the situation in Kosmet is described as far away not only in space, but also as far removed from the progress of the other republics in time. The campaign, according to Vida Tomšić, would start to change something in accordance to the “pace of civilization”. Tomšić argued that it was “necessary to liberate women in Kosmet from those old habits, and show them the path to a better life, so that they can get rid of those millennial habits. I would like the other advanced republics from which help is required to think of this as a unique political mobilization.”<sup>11</sup>

Yet the situation on the ground was very complex and difficult. These campaigns

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<sup>10</sup> Belgrade, Arhiv Jugoslavije, AFŽ fund, 141-20-112.

<sup>11</sup> “Potrebno je osloboditi ženu sa Kosmeta tih starih navika i pokazati joj put boljeg života, kako bi ona raskinula te hiljaduvekovne stare navike. Ja bih želela da napredne republike od kojih se traži pomoć za ovo to shvate kao jednu političku mobilizaciju (...)” Sednica Izvršnog Odbora AFŽ – 2.2.1951. Belgrade, Arhiv Jugoslavije, AFŽ fund, 141-8-93.

of “emancipation from above” were met with great resistance and suspicion. The AFŽ reports from the field testify to the difficulty and the complexity of the grassroots campaigns with regard to differences in ethnic and gender relations. Men and religious authorities strongly opposed women’s abandonment of the full veil. Oppositional voices spread the rumour that women’s unveiling would mean that they would be forcefully enrolled in the army and in the brigades for voluntary work. After having taken off the veil during the demonstrations held on the 8th of March or 1st of May, many women started to wear it once again. When the law forcefully forbade the *feredže*, many women decided to stay indoors. Soon it became evident that symbolic actions and legislative measures were far from efficient, and that the campaign against the *feredže* had to be accompanied by material actions which promoted women’s literacy and economic emancipation through employment; the negotiation with men, and particularly with the Islamic authorities, was also seen as essential in order to convince women of the possibility to abandon the veil without being stigmatized by their community. The fact that it was often Serbian or Croatian women conducting the campaign among Muslim women was identified as a big weakness of the campaign, since it risked exacerbating ethnic tensions.

In a 1947 report on the situation in Bosnia, a few passages in particular deserve to be quoted, since they summarize the many issues at stake in the campaign against *feredže*:

The action to remove the veil was met with a stormy revolt on the side of the reactionaries, which includes Muslims, Serbs and Croats. At this stage it has engendered a return to the old position of incitement to ethnic and religious hatred. The Serbian and Croatian reactionaries used the campaign to launch the slogan: “here you are, that’s the gift you received for having been good militants” [ironic, i.e. that’s the punishment you get]. In a number of cases the Muslim reactionaries stated explicitly that they would not allow women to unveil just because they do not want them to be equal to Serbian and Croatian women.

This passage shows how postwar ethnic tensions were an obstacle to a campaign like this which would encourage women of different ethnicities to work together. The author continues:

Many Muslim women working in our organization were met with a strong resistance, which is usually an expression of religious fanaticism, cultural backwardness, and often the husbands’ stubbornness. The lack of understanding on the side of husband and relatives was the main obstacle to the action. There were cases in which the female comrade told us: “If you think that I should uncover myself, you should immediately get me a place to stay or an apartment, since my husband will throw me out of the house.”<sup>12</sup>

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12 “Akcijska za skidanje zara naišla je na buru revolta od strane reakcije i to udružene muslimanske, srpske i hrvatske. Na tom pitanju ona je podgrijavała svoj stari stav po pitanju raspirivanja nacionalne i vjerske mržnje. Srpska i hrvatska reakcija iskoristili su akciju skidanja zara da se narugaju Muslimanima i izbacili su parolu: “Eto, to vam je za uzdarje sto ste dobri fron-

The opposition of male relatives and the “incorrect view of women as [not full] human beings” convinced the AFŽ activists that women’s emancipation could not be achieved without changing men’s positions and attitudes on this issue. The story of Didara cited at the beginning of this chapter shows how important it was to involve the male community when dealing with changes in women’s position. The AFŽ workers realized that women’s inferiority and male opposition to social change were certainly more extreme in the less developed republics, but existed in different forms among local authorities and institutions all over the Federation. As I will show in the next sections, this was an important strategic realization that led AFŽ cadres to question the efficiency of a separate women’s organization.

### 1.3. Feminist historiography and the dissolution of the AFŽ in 1953

In the previous sections I have addressed the difficulties faced by the Antifascist Women’s Front when dealing with struggles for women’s equality in the field. In this section I discuss the issue of strategic choices adopted by the organization, when its leadership chose to abandon the form of a separate women’s organization in 1953. In the years after the Cominform crisis, in line with its top-down, pedagogic character, the AFŽ mainly targeted, as I have described above, women’s living conditions in the villages, particularly in the less developed regions and republics. While having some degree of political autonomy during the Second World War (Sklevicky 1996; 1989b), the AFŽ was conceived by the communist elites not as an autonomous women’s organization fighting for women’s rights, but rather, as as “an instrument of progressive forces under the direction of the Communist party in the struggle for the national, democratic and social rights of the Yugoslav peoples.”<sup>13</sup> In the immediate postwar period, in particular, the existence of a separate woman’s organization was seen as a temporary means to “drawn the widest feminine masses, especially the most backward ones, into the building of socialism, helping them to achieve civic conscious-

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tovci.” Bilo je dosta slučajeva da su muslimanski reacioneri izjavljivali da neće da otkriju žene samo zato da ne budu jednake sa Srpkinjama i Hrvaticama. Veliki otpor pokazale su i mnoge Muslimanke koje su aktivno radile u našoj organizaciji, tu uglavnom dolazi do izražaja vjerski fanatizam, kulturna zaostalost, a često i muževljeva samovolja. To nerazumjevanje od strane muževa i rodbine bilo je nekada glavna prepeka akciji. Bilo je takvih slučajeva gdje drugarica kaže: ‘Ako vi smatrate da ja treba da se otkrijem, odmah mi tražite mjesto ili stan jer ce me muž istjerati iz kuće.’” 24.12.1947, Zemaljski odbor AFŽ za Bosnu i Hercegovinu – Centralnom Odbor AFŽ-a; Belgrade, Arhiv Jugoslavije, AFŽ fund, 141-2-7.

13 “AFŽ za razliku od mnogih ženskih organizacija u svetu, nije od svog početka bio organizacija za borbu za ženska prava, vec je nastao kao instrument progresivnih snaga pod rukovodstvom Komunističke partije u borbi za nacionalna, demokratska i socijalna prava naroda Jugoslavije.” Vida Tomšić, “Mesto i uloga ženskih organizacija u danasnoj etapi razvitka socijalističkih društvenih odnosa”, IV AFŽ Congress, 1953, Belgrade, Arhiv Jugoslavije, AFŽ fund, 141-5-302.

ness, which can only be reached by educating women, by raising their cultural level, thus with a wide-reaching cultural-educational work.”<sup>14</sup>

The problem of separate women’s organization vs. ‘universal’ party work has been a long-standing one in the history of socialist and communist parties (Thonnessen 1976). On the one hand, the idea that women should be fighting separately for women’s rights contrasted with the Marxist assumptions held by generations of socialist feminists, which held that only a transformation of society as a whole could bring about women’s emancipation. On the other hand, since party leaders saw the “feminine masses” as oppressed and politically backward, separate women’s organizations were considered a necessary step to achieve a first degree of politicization, allowing women to participate in “universal” party work.

The AFŽ of Yugoslavia resembled in this respect to the Soviet *Ženotdel*, the Woman’s Section of the Soviet Central Committee, an organization founded in 1919. Separate women’s sections were created at each level of the party, and these sections in each village or town were designed to familiarize women with politics, integrating them into political and social life.<sup>15</sup> As Elizabeth Wood (1997) shows, however, the women’s sections – and particularly their most politicized female leaders – found themselves in a contradictory position: these sections were seen as a temporary devices to draw women into the party, and were not supposed to raise oppositional voices against the government, for fear of resembling feminist organizations. But in their work on the ground, female activists were confronted with gender conflicts and the fact that local party committees boycotted their “work among women”. It commonly happened that male party leaders refused to send their wives to the meetings, and to provide support to the women’s sections, something that the AFŽ would also experience. The Soviet *Ženotdel* was dismantled in 1929: its female leaders started to criticize the Soviet government for not providing the necessary services and for discriminating against female workers, and were accused of “feminist deviation”.<sup>16</sup>

Lydia Sklevicky describes a similar process for the AFŽ in the postwar years. After the Cominform crisis, according to Sklevicky, the organization was gradually placed under the control of the party and dismantled for fear of “feminist deviation”. Until 1950, there were around 1000 paid functionaries working for the AFŽ, plus some administrative staff, which guaranteed a permanent female leadership in charge of the organization.<sup>17</sup> In 1950 the Central Committee of the Yugoslav Communist Party

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14 “AFŽ ima zadatak da najšire ženske mase, specijalno one najzaostaliije, uvlači u izgradnju socijalizma, da im pomaže da postanu njegovi svesni graditelji, a to se ne može postići bez prosvetčenosti žene, i podizanja njenog kulturnog nivoa, dakle bez širokog kulturno-prosvetnog rada.” “O radu i zadacima naše organizacije u pitanju suzbijanja nepismenosti i skidanju feredže.” 19-20.9.1948. Belgrade, Arhiv Jugoslavije, AFŽ fund, 141-6-319.

15 Separate meetings were seen as the only way to reach the *baba*, the backward countryside women that had to be transformed into a new comrade. As Elizabeth Wood reports, *Ženotdel* leader Aleksandra Kollontai stated that only by talking to rural women about their sick cow, one could eventually come to talk of world revolution (Wood 1997, 84).

16 For a collection of essays on women’s history in the Stalin era, see Ilić, 2001.

17 Seven women worked in the Central Committee in Belgrade, five to seven in the main

questioned the AFŽ's efficiency, and imposed a re-organization, in which its professional staff was dismissed.<sup>18</sup> In this way, the heretofore vertical structure of the AFŽ was abolished, and the organization gradually "dissolved into a number of small and mutually unrelated units, called 'actives', and integrated into the PF [Popular Front] on respective hierarchical levels" (Sklevicky 1989b: 103; see also Sklevicky 1996; Mikula 2005). In 1953 the organization merged with the broader Socialist Alliance – which replaced the Popular Front – and was renamed Union of Women's Societies (*Savez Ženskih Društava*).

The lack of autonomous organizational structure, according to Sklevicky (1989b: 106), "incapacitated any collective action by women themselves" and transformed the AFŽ into an "amorphous organization" reinforcing traditional women's roles. Despite the fact that AFŽ reports show "an acute awareness of pressing problems" – such as the tendency to lay off pregnant women and single mothers, the harassment of children born out of wedlock, the desperate conditions of orphanages, and the dissatisfaction of women in the labor force – these concerns could not be voiced in an autonomous way in an authoritarian society. "Progressive women", in particular, especially AFŽ leaders, "were constantly showing signs of divided loyalties by supporting organizational schemes dictated by 'broader' and 'more relevant' political needs, at the evident expense of the AWF[AFŽ] and of women in general." In her book about former partisan women in the postwar period, Bgrade historian Ivana Pantelić also notes that the "dependent character of the WAF[AFŽ] in politics led to its transformation or rather its abolition. Female partisans did nothing to stop the WAF from being abolished" (Pantelić 2011: 203). According to these historical interpretations, the leaders of the organization finally dissolved the Antifascist Women's Front because of their loyalty to the party, choosing thus the party line over other women and over AFŽ rank and file militants, who objected to the dissolution of the organization at its Fourth Congress in 1953.

While the fear of feminism certainly played a role in the dissolution of the AFŽ, this interpretation – mediated by the principle of autonomy elaborated by second wave feminist theory – runs the risk of reducing this event to an a-historical manifestation of patriarchal backlash, or of male party control over women's organizing, without explaining what the historical and political reasons were that compelled the leaders of the AFŽ to dissolve the vertical organization from within. I suggest here that we need a more complex interpretation of the decision to dismantle the AFŽ, one that takes into account the overall political and economic transformations of the Yugoslav system in the early 1950s, and the ambivalent role played by female communist leaders. More specific research into party archives would be required in order to document this process in detail, but for the purpose of this research I will offer an interpretation based on the the internal debates between AFŽ delegates that preceded the dissolution of the organization.

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Committee of each Republic, three or four in the regional committees (*oblast*), and one or two in the district committees.

18 The professional apparatus was reduced to a minimum: one secretary at the Central Committee, one or two women at the Republics' Committees, and no paid positions at the local level, except in Kosovo.

#### 1.4. The women's question as a social question: the IV and last AFŽ Congress

In the immediate period after the Cominform crisis, the Yugoslav communist elites were looking for new sources of political and economic legitimacy, defining their position as opposed “not only to the liberal West, but also to the statist Socialism of the Soviet Union” (Jović 2009: 4). This legitimacy was partly found in Marxist theory, specifically in the ideal of workers' self-management, decentralization and the progressive “withering away of the state” in the transition from socialism to communism. The system of workers' councils (*radnički saveti*) – elaborated by Slovene communist intellectual Edvard Kardelj (1910-1979) – was conceived as a third way between the Western democracies and Soviet statist bureaucracy.

The new policies of self-management and the decentralisation of economic production to the different republics was elaborated in an attempt to regulate employment, labour productivity and the distribution of consumer goods. This was also a way to steer the Yugoslav economic system towards a market economy, as a consequence of Western aid (Unkovski-Korica 2011). The system of self-management was supposed to promote workers' direct participation at all levels of society, while avoiding Soviet-style state intervention.<sup>19</sup> The League of Communists – the new name for the communist party since 1952 – has then, according to Kardelj, “no pretensions of ruling in the place of the working masses, but wishes to inspire and educate the masses so that they will know how to lead their own government, their own factories, and their own social organs and organizations” (Kardelj, quoted in Lilly 2001: 211).

Between 1950 and 1951, as a result of the new Law on self-management, many Federal governmental organs, committees and administrative boards were abolished, and their powers transferred to the republican and municipal districts. This process of decentralization was seen as a necessary measure to avoid the creation of a bureaucracy that would resemble the Soviet system (see Broz 1963: 123- 128). The result, however, was a strengthening of bureaucratic procedures, one that would prove fatal to the Federation as a whole in the long run (Jović 2009). In this phase of decentralization, the professional apparatus of the AFŽ was also abolished, as mentioned in the previous section. In 1953, the AFŽ as a hierarchical Federal organization was dissolved, and transformed into the Union of Women's Societies (*Savez Ženskih Društava*). This transition which has not been explored or interpreted by historians, and has simply been read as the end of the AFŽ and of women's organizations in Yugoslavia.<sup>20</sup>

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19 “New ‘delegate assemblies’ were created, and thousands of people really became members of groups such as delegations, workers' councils, and self-managing interest communities (...). A complex electoral system was introduced that abandoned equal representation of citizens, replacing it with functional representation of social groups. The Party still kept the leading role, but without being named a party (since 1952: the League of Communists), and was supposed to run society by persuasion of the workers and citizens (assembled in the Socialist Alliance of the Working People), not directly. The system of self-management was to replace the state, which was decentralized on its way to withering away” (Jović 2009: 77).

20 Historical interpretations generally treat the period between 1945 and 1953, but do not explore the transition from the previous organization to the ones following, namely the Union of



The dissolution of the AFŽ and the transition to the Union of Women's Societies was partly caused, however, by the structural limitations of the AFŽ in the 1950s, as militants pointed out in their reports. In the early 1950s, AFŽ activists noted that a process of patriarchal backlash was taking place not just in the most backward areas, but all over the Federation: the numbers of women elected to the republican and district committees rapidly decreased, as did the number of women employed in the industry. In the agricultural and industrial sector male worker's collectives openly voiced the idea that women's labor was less efficient and less valuable. The idea that a woman's proper place is at home remained widespread among women and men, including respectable male comrades. Many male comrades said that there was no need for women to do anything else than staying at home, cooking and taking care of the children. According to many male comrades, in fact, "the revolutionary time in which she could be a revolutionary worker had passed."<sup>21</sup>

The AFŽ delegates in the main republican committees as well as in the executive and central committees<sup>22</sup> regularly denounced the gap between the official discourse on women's equality promoted by the party at a Federal level and the indifference or overt hostility towards social changes manifested by local party authorities. During a session of the AFŽ Executive Committee in Ljubljana in September 1952, the AFŽ delegates discussed the fact that the party took no interest in the issue of women's emancipation, which was constantly delegated to the AFŽ. Bosnian AFŽ leader Dušanka Kovačević pointed out that even among female comrades who had taken part in the Resistance, the idea that it was enough for women to stay at home with children persisted. Similarly, the transformation of the family in a socialist sense was a neglected issue: "We talked very little about what is really moral. It's a terrible thing that a worker who is a member of the party – who is a shockworker, a patriot, in the high ranks, reading this or that – at the same time beats his wife, neglects his children, likes to drink, and nobody holds him accountable for this."<sup>23</sup> Kovačević observed that the issue of family relations could not be treated only as a woman's issue, but it was a structural problem concerning society as a whole. Therefore it could not be solved by the AFŽ alone, republican and local authorities had to address it too.

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Women's Societies (created in 1953), and the Conference for the Social Activity of Women (created in 1961). For an account of the activities of the Croatian KDAŽ branch, see Dobos (1983).

21 "Kako može žena da se bavi nekim drugim? Njezino je mesto kod kuće, da gleda decu, da dobro kuva itd. Prošlo je ovo revolucionarno vreme kada je ona mogla da bude revolucionarni radnik." Izvrsnog odbora AFŽ Jugoslavije, 9.5.1953, Skopje – Belgrade, Arhiv Jugoslavije, AFŽ fund, 141-8-254.

22 I am talking here not about delegates at the municipal level or in the voter assemblies, but rather about delegates to pre-congress discussions in the bodies higher up in the hierarchy. Thanks to Vladimir Unkovski-Korica for suggesting that I clarify this issue.

23 "Veoma smo malo govorili o tome što je zapravo moral i strašno je to, da radnik koji je član Partije, udarnik je, patriota je, na visini je i čita to ili ono, a pored toga tuče ženu, zanemaruje djecu, voli da popije, a niko ga zbog toga ne poziva na odgovornost." Sednica Izvrsnog Odbora CO AFŽ Jugoslavije, 23-24 settembre 1952, Ljubljana, p. 13. Belgrade, Arhiv Jugoslavije, AFŽ fund, 141-8.

In a May 1953 Executive Committee discussion, various delegates complained that party members did not engage on the issue of equality between men and women, but instead used the existence of the AFŽ as an alibi to shirk responsibility. Neda Božinović stressed the issue of women's double burden within "progressive" families: "Is it not possible that at home, husband and wife as members of the family jointly perform certain tasks, and that the husband helps the wife? But our comrades are astounded when we say these things." According to Božinović, these were general problems that could only be solved within the framework of the Socialist Alliance and not by female activists alone. Božinović stressed the importance of enlightening not only women, but also men, through the structures of the party: "I think that it is a matter of fighting not only on concrete issues, for the enlightenment of women etc., but also for the enlightenment of men, that is to say, to look at what women's equality means from women's perspective, and without merely accepting palliative measures."<sup>24</sup>

During the meetings which preceded the fourth AFŽ Congress in 1953, many AFŽ delegates stressed the importance of fighting the unequal relationships within families and of improving women's inferior role in a socialist society. At the same time, many AFŽ delegates agreed that a "specific organization" (*posebna organizacija*) of women was no longer a useful instrument. As they had experienced "in the field" the task of emancipating the masses was in fact a "gigantic" one, which needed to be addressed in a systemic manner by the political authorities.

These considerations finally led to the dissolution of the AFŽ and to the formation of the Union of Women's Society during the fourth AFŽ Congress in September 1953. Communist leader Milovan Đilas opened the congress with a speech that dealt with the 'women's question'. He argued that while these issues may seem to concern only women, they were in fact social issues and concerned the whole community. He noted that equality had already been established by law, but that real equality had not yet been reached and that the struggle to achieve it continued at home, in the family, in the opinions, and in the intimate life. Đilas argued that women should not separate themselves from men in social life, but rather strive to integrate society in order to reach equality. According to Đilas, in fact, socialist democracy was not possible with-

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24 "Dalje, u Socijalističkom savezu naveliko se diskutuje o ravnopravnosti žena. Diskutujete malo sa drugovima, sa našim dobrim drugovima na rukovodnim mestima. Mi stalno pričamo o dvostrukoj opterećenosti žene. Da li je potrebno i u ovakvim uslovima žena bude dvostruko opterećena? Zar je ne moguće da kod kuće muž i žena kao članovi te porodice zajednički obavljaju izvesne poslove, da muž pomaže ženu? Međutim naši drugovi se zgranjavaju od tih stvari. I mislim ima tu niz problema i niz pitanja koji pred našim ženama ostaju za rešavanje i koju ostaju za rešavanje pred Socijalističkom savezom i da nema nikada da bude dovoljno da li to možda još malo i da za sve nas ima dovoljno rada na rešavanju svih tih problema. S toga smatram kada se radi o borbi ne samo za konkretne stvari prosvetčivanja žene itd. vec i za prosvetčivanje muškaraca, ako hocete, u pogledu žene da bi jedanput konkretno postavili sta je to ravnopravnost žene i da ne polazimo od toga da idemo palijativno." Izvršnog odbora AFŽ Jugoslavije, 9.5.1953, Skopje. Belgrade, Arhiv Jugoslavije, AFŽ collection, 141-8-246.

out women's participation: "There is no socialist democracy, there is no socialism if women do not take part in the economic, political and cultural life."<sup>25</sup>

Vida Tomšić's speech, after Đilas, recalled the history of the AFŽ and of the construction of socialism in Yugoslavia. Tomšić again referred to the "old Marxist truth" according to which one can gauge the state of the working class and of socialism in a country from the position of women in its society.<sup>26</sup> She then compared circumstances in Yugoslavia with the situation in the USSR, stating that at the level of women's emancipation it was not possible to follow the example of the Soviet Union, and forcefully modify society from above. It was necessary instead to consider the existing problems and to look at the way in which old and new ways of living coexist. Tomšić stressed the importance of economic and social rights ("jednaka plata za jednaki rad"), and of the education of girls. She stressed the conflict between women's roles as wives and mothers and women's roles as active citizens, arguing that this conflict was most acute in the first years of the socialist revolution, when women were needed for the reconstruction of the country and the welfare services were not yet developed.

Later in her speech, Tomšić denounced some "incorrect" interpretations of self-management and decentralization, and the return of some supposedly "democratic" theories according to which women's proper place was the family. The process of decentralization, according to Tomšić, had been interpreted in certain places as a "return to capitalism", and women were again treated "as awaiting marriage, or as a spouse who is dependent on the salary of her husband." Tomšić criticized this view, and the fact that a number of workers' collectives had dismissed female workers on the basis of their "less valuable" labor. Tomšić tried to establish a new ideal of women's emancipation corresponding to the new ideological line of the party – one that refused both Soviet-style state intervention and capitalist patriarchal ideology.<sup>27</sup>

After having criticized the feminine press for reviving feminine stereotypes in the domain of fashion and appearance, Tomšić stated: "No one thinks that within socialism everyone should wear the same clothes and forget about variety and beauty. But that's very different from the obvious effort aimed at turning a woman into a doll who thinks that outward appearance is the most significant aspect for her social position, and that only appearance, and not her work, provides her with a place in society."<sup>28</sup> Tomšić stressed instead the importance of work and economic independ-

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25 "Nema socijalističke demokratije, nema socijalizma ako žena ne sudeluje u ekonomskom, političkom i kulturnom životu." Stenografske Beleske, IV Kongres AFŽ, 27, 28, 29. 9. 1953, Belgrade, Arhiv Jugoslavije, AFŽ fund, 141-5. It is interesting to note that only one year later Đilas would become Yugoslavia's main dissident because of his articles against the "new class" of state bureaucrats published in the newspaper *Borba*.

26 "Na ovom se opet potvrđuje stara marksistička istina, da je položaj žene u jednom društvu u prvom redu ovisan od opšteg položaja u kojem se nalazi radni narod, da je položaj žene i njezine emancipacije jedno od pitanja proleterske revolucije, socijalizma." Stenografske Beleske, IV Kongres AFŽ, 27, 28, 29. 9. 1953, Belgrade, Arhiv Jugoslavije, AFŽ fund, 141-5.289.

27 Ibidem.

28 "Niko ne misli pri tome, da bi u socijalizmu morali svi nositi jednaka odela i zaboraviti na raznolikost i lepotu, ali to je potpuno različita stvar od očitih nastojanja da se žena opet pretvori

ence for women's self-consciousness. The aforementioned quotation by Tomšić clearly summarizes the ambivalent position of AFŽ leaders towards shifts in socialist ideology after the Cominform crisis, and it gives a sense of the contradictory ideals of femininity that were circulating in Yugoslavia in the early 1950s.

The AFŽ leaders struggled to abandon Soviet-style centralism and modernize women's lives in a socialist country, without falling back into the consumerist ideal of femininity promoted by the West. In a series of very progressive arguments on women's role in the socialist society, Tomšić concluded that the AFŽ was no longer useful in the new political phase. During her speech at the fourth Congress, Tomšić declared that the AFŽ had played an enormous role in the socialist construction in Yugoslavia, and that unlike women's organizations (read: feminist organizations) in other countries, it had been fully integrated within the revolutionary process. In this new phase, however, women's separate organizing would "lead to the mistaken opinion that in order to achieve women's rights, women would have to fight against the rest of society, and this is particularly dangerous. A similar way of organizing would demobilize women in the self-managing institutions."<sup>29</sup>

From the documents that precede and follow the fourth Congress, it is evident that the self-dissolution of the AFŽ was seen by Tomšić and by other delegates as a logical step in integrating and mobilizing women within the new system of self-management. The fear of being labeled feminist and that a separate women's organization could foster critique of the socialist authorities certainly played a role, but so did the AFŽ leaders' faith in the possibility to "mainstream" the issue of equality within the institutions of socialist self-management, and the fear that a separate women's organization would isolate female activists from universal party politics. The decision to create the Union of Women's Society was aligned to the new direction of socialist self-management, a line that wished to "inspire and educate the masses so that they will know how to lead their own government." The work on specific women's issues (education, hygiene, motherhood, labor) was decentralized to the republics, the communes and the workplaces. This strategical decision had mixed results "in the field", and different consequences in the different republics and communes. Even though the decision was supposed to encourage women's direct participation, decision-making and activism from below, an avant-garde in fact continued to impose it from above.

While in the more developed republics and communes an organization specifically for women was no longer necessary, since women were active in all kinds of local "societies" and committees with different purposes, in the less developed regions the lack of a specific women's organization enforcing "emancipation from above" de-

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u lutku koja misli da je za njen društveni položaj od najvećeg značanja njen spoljašni izgled, i da samo time, a ne svojim radom, sebi obezbeđuje mesto u društvu." Belgrade, Arhiv Jugoslavije, AFŽ fund, 141-5.297.

29 "Ako bi sada u ovim uslovima za politički rad među ženama imali posebne ženske organizacije to bi vodilo odvajanju žena iz našeg političkog života, dovodilo bi do pogrešnog shvatanja da se za ostvarivanje prava žena one moraju same boriti protiv ostalog društva, sto je naročito opasno. Takav rad bi demobilisao žene u organima društvene samouprave." Belgrade, Arhiv Jugoslavije, AFŽ fund, 141-5.303.

prived women of state support against local forms of patriarchal control. The process of decentralization and self-management, thus, paradoxically disempowered women in the less developed republics. A statement by AFŽ leader Neda Božinović is testimony to the negative effect of AFŽ dissolution. Božinović tells of AFŽ work in the villages: “I remember the meetings in which women came to complain about their husbands beating them, without shame. (...) Then, of course, we agreed that a couple of women would go to reprimand the husband. Husbands were not allowed to do many things because of fear of the AFŽ.” She then recalls how peasant women in the villages protested when the organization was abolished and placed under the direction of the Socialist Alliance. “- ‘Why did you abolish the AFŽ?’ they asked – ‘Well, I said, there is now the Union of Women’s Societies.’” “Come on, they said, our AFŽ ... it’s a monstrous sin that you have committed. Where are we going to gather now? Our husbands go to the pub, drink, play cards, play dice, and we sit at home and take care of children. Since there’s no AFŽ, we no longer gather.”<sup>30</sup>

One can gather a hint of the “feminist threat” represented by the AFŽ from Elissa Helms’ dissertation on present-day women’s activism in Bosnia-Herzegovina. According to Helms, while the AFŽ was dismantled in 1953, “the name has remained, however, in colloquial speech as a pejorative label for any independent women’s political initiative or often even merely gatherings of women, unaccompanied by males, in public places” (Helms 2003: 55). The name of the AFŽ in Bosnia-Herzegovina is still associated with a utopian subversion of “natural” women’s roles: “the mere appearance of a large group of women in a hotel restaurant normally dominated by men was enough for some men gathered there (...) to condescendingly intone, ‘Ugh, here’s the AFŽ’ (*Uf, evo AFŽa*) for everyone to hear” (Helms 2003: 59). From this account, written fifty years after the dissolution of the AFŽ, one can measure the persistence of patriarchal structures and beliefs, and the radical effects of abolishing a separate organization fighting women’s oppression.

As I have tried to demonstrate in this section, the demise of the AFŽ cannot be interpreted simply as a sign of patriarchal backlash, but needs to be situated in the new ideological framework developed by socialist authorities in the early 1950s.<sup>31</sup> In this section I have highlighted women’s different positions and political subjectivities within the AFŽ, and in particular AFŽ delegates’ conflicting loyalties between the party and the “feminine masses”. The party’s “continuing ambivalence about and ultimately its refusal to accept the unpredictable consequences of genuine activism from below” (Lilly 2011: 153) was also affecting AFŽ delegates’ view of rural women.

<sup>30</sup> Testimony by Neda Božinović (1917- 2001). Stojaković, Jankov and Savić (2002: 47 – 48).

<sup>31</sup> The transition from the AFŽ to the Union of Women’s Society itself deserves to be studied more extensively. Here I have concentrated mainly on the perspective of leaders and high-ranking delegates. Research into the rank-and-file members and into the significance of the AFŽ “from below” would allow for a better assessment of this transition, particularly in the rural areas. The great difference between the “more advanced” and “less advanced” republics further complicates matters, and further comparative research would be needed to establish the impact of the AFŽ and of its demise in the different republics. See for instance Stojaković (2010) on the AFŽ in Vojvodina.

AFŽ delegates often had to settle for moderate mid-term results when working with peasant women in remote villages, and had to compromise their emancipatory ideals. The reality of women's patriarchal oppression contradicted AFŽ delegates' faith in social change, and their subjective experience as rational, modern subjects. Often there were also considerable differences in opinion of what constituted a desirable standard of women's equality, as already evidenced by Vida Tomšić's statement on the need to preserve beauty while encouraging women's independent position in the public sphere. While in general AFŽ delegates had an urban background, and saw the propagation of modern urban lifestyles as progress in terms of living standards, other delegates noticed that the "urbanization" of the peasants did not necessarily bring an increased emancipation among women.<sup>32</sup> Despite these limits, until 1953 debates between delegates continued to be lively, engaged and informed. Because of their work "in the field", female activists had a very thorough understanding of the problems faced by women. This political edge was lost with the demise of the organization in 1953, and with its integration into the Socialist Alliance, an event that in my view had more to do with the bureaucratization of the Yugoslav political system of self-management, than with male patriarchal control over women.

## **2. The UDI in the early Cold War era**

### **2.1. UDI campaigns in 1948-53: class conflicts and solidarity networks**

As discussed in the previous two chapters, the Union of Italian Women was also affected by increasing geopolitical tensions in the early Cold War period. After the victory of the Christian-Democrats at the elections of April 1948, and as a result of growing polarizations between the Eastern and Western blocs, a strong wave of anti-communist reaction was directed at the Socialist Party, the Communist Party, and the associations affiliated with these parties, such as the UDI. In July 1949, the Vatican explicitly condemned the communist ideology, excommunicating those Catholics who adhered to the PCI.<sup>33</sup> After first having advocated measures of economic austerity which were a precondition for receiving US aid, the Christian-Democratic government sided with the industrial elites and landowners in the ongoing class con-

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32 One delegate declared for instance: "We constantly hear about the need to reduce the distance between village and town. But this distance isn't reduced when a peasant woman cuts her hair, curls its, has a manicure and dresses like a city woman. The principle we have established is (...) to raise the cultural level of our villages and our villagers, to teach everything we can so that (s)he becomes a cultivated human being." Zagreb, Državni Arhiv, AFŽ-KDAŽ-HR-HDA 1234-5-k.56. IV Kongres AFŽ Jugoslavije 1953 – minutes of the meetings "Sa sastanka diskusione grupe za prosvetna pitanja", p.8 (Meeting with the discussion group about educational issue). About gender relations and urbanization in Yugoslavia, see Denich (1976).

33 This happened to Catholic and communist intellectual Franco Rodano (1920-1983), husband of UDI activist and founder Marisa Rodano, and one of the main proponents of PCI openness to Catholic believers.

flict: under the direction of Mario Scelba, the ministry of the Interior reorganized the police force, encouraging them to intervene in workers' and peasants' struggles (Ginsborg 2003: 110).

In this atmosphere of conservative reaction, the UDI's primary task was to "seize every occasion to mobilize women" for the cause of the Popular Front through a number of grassroots campaigns and particularly through so-called 'differential associations' (*associazioni differenziali*), that is, associations uniting women on specific issues and causes (peasant women, war widows, female heads of households, housewives, women working from home, etc.). These associations were all part of the Feminine Alliance established in support of the Popular Front during the 1948 elections. The UDI, as the association of the "best, most conscious and politically aware women", was supposed to function as the directive avant-garde of the Alliance, reaching out to the feminine masses that would join the Alliance through grassroots campaigns. Even if the goals of the organization during these years were largely based on the line of the Popular Front, this did not necessarily mean an erasure of gender-based concerns, or a lack of space for women's agency.

As recalled by some of its protagonists these were years "of exceptional women's mobilization, presence and fighting spirit" (Michetti, Repetto and Viviani 1998: 22). In years of great conservatism, the UDI became an "amplifier" of social struggles and defended in particular the most exploited categories of female workers in the agricultural and industrial sector: rice-weeders, olive pickers, seasonal labourers, sharecroppers, and women who worked from home (Michetti, Repetto and Viviani 1998: 35). A constituent assembly of the "agricultural proletariat" took place in Bologna in December 1947; through the associations of women from the countryside and the trade unions, the left-wing forces supported a number of workers' demands for better living and working conditions.

The living conditions of peasant women were particularly harsh in the postwar period. The prices of food were very high in relation to the salaries of agricultural labourers (*braccianti*), and unemployment in the agriculture sector was widespread. A study of female labourers in the countryside near Bologna after the war notes that peasant women had no right to medical assistance, and would perform, even when pregnant, heavy tasks for up to 16 hours a day. The rice-weeders (*mondine*), in particular, worked in the mud for up to 15 hours a day for 7 months a year, with few pauses and constantly surveilled by guards. Since no welfare was available, pregnant women carried on working until late in their pregnancy, resulting in 25 per cent of pregnancies ending in stillbirth (Acerra 1978: 158). In several waves of strikes in the late 1940s, agricultural day laborers and rice weeders demanded better salaries, better food, medical assistance, and a decent place to stay. In the great struggle of thousands of day labourers in Val Padana, held in May 1949, the demonstration and the picket lines were violently repressed. The former partisan, war widow and rice-weeder Maria Margotti was killed by a *carabiniere*, and 30 other people were injured. At the end of the battle the rice-weeders negotiated a new contract, which limited the length of the working day and obliged the landowners to provide decent facilities where the workers could rest. The landowners, however, did not easily comply with the new contract,

and hence the struggles continued (Ravera 1978: 194-195). The UDI supported agricultural struggles all over Italy, and developed a thorough understanding of women's lives in the different regions of Italy. In the following years, the organization opposed the "coefficiente Serpieri" approved under Fascism, a calculation method which valued women's work in the countryside at only 40 per cent of work done by men.

The position of women working in the industrial sector became critical after 1948. The wave of austerity and lay-offs brought greater female unemployment, and made it difficult to resist overexploitation and low salaries, particularly in the textile industries. In 1950, the president of Confindustria declared that "in Italy there is an excess of remuneration for women", while in all sectors women were paid less than men and received fewer welfare benefits. The working conditions were unsafe and unhealthy, with factories being excessively hot, lacking hygiene, and so on. Between the summer of 1949 and April 1950, textile workers' agitations took place in 4,088 firms in Lombardy, Piedmont, Veneto, Tuscany, Liguria and Campania (Ravera 1978: 190-192). The tobacco sector, too, was on strike. The 100,000 tabacchine, the women producing tobacco and cigarettes in humid, dark factories that devastated their health agitated for better conditions. Their renewal of their national contract was obtained in 1950 after a very long strike, brutally repressed by the police (Ravera 1978: 196). The PCI and the UDI defended different categories of female workers throughout Italy, organized conferences and solidarity networks, and effectively promoted, through strikes and mobilizations, women's demands for "equal pay for equal work". The UDI also started to claim welfare provisions and retirement pensions not just for female workers, but also for housewives.

A progressive measure proposed by the UDI and the Popular Front was the law for the "Physical and economic protection of working mothers" (*Per la tutela fisica ed economica delle madri lavoratrici*), a law that would regulate female workers' maternity rights. Teresa Noce proposed and carried out the approval of this law with great determination. In the postwar period, after the Resistance and her deportation to Ravensbruck, she became a delegate to the Constituent Assembly and the secretary of the Union of Female Textile Workers (FIOT). In her autobiography she recounts how the law proposal was developed in a myriad of grassroot meetings, assemblies, and consultations with female workers all over Italy, popularizing these demands among women of different political and social backgrounds. After strenuous popular and parliamentary battles, the law for the "Physical and economic protection of working mothers" was approved in August 1950, with a generous provision of 80 per cent of salary for five months of maternity leave, three before and two after the pregnancy; the law forbade the dismissal of pregnant women until the child's first year; in the presence of more than fifty women workers, the firm had to support the creation of kindergardens. The Christian-Democratic party managed to modify this provision in a conservative sense, adding that the workers had to be "married" (*coniugate*) to obtain the crèches. Nonetheless, maternity rights were extended in this way from textile workers to other categories of industrial and agricultural workers (see Noce 1974: 405-413).



It is interesting to note that Teresa Noce, while deeply engaged in the fight for women's rights as workers, opposed separate women's organizations, and had refused to take part in the UDI.<sup>34</sup> Noce (1974: 414) recalled that she had frequent disagreements with the younger generation of women who were part of the UDI: "I had the impression that they were too feminist, and that they did not deal enough with the problems of working women, who were, then, the majority of Italian women, if we consider that even most of the housewives had worked outside of the house before marrying. But the comrades, probably, found me too sectarian and not feminine enough." The UDI, however, fully embraced the campaign for paid maternity leave and promoted it throughout the country.

The figure of Teresa Noce – representative of the old antifascist generation – shows the great diversity of positions that existed within the leftist camp on the issue of "work among women"; it also proves that political transformation in women's lives could be achieved through class-based political engagement, since many Italian women were oppressed by a gendered and classist division of labor. In the last part of this chapter I will return to the discussion of class-based party work vs. "work among women" within the UDI. In the next section I will give some more examples of PCI and UDI postwar activities, looking at the campaigns for land occupation taking place in Southern Italy in 1949-1950, and at the support offered by the UDI to the victims of war rapes in Cassino.

## 2.2. Peasant movements in Southern Italy: a "woman with no name"

In the immediate postwar period the South of Italy was in a condition of dire misery, as a consequence of Fascism and of the economic crisis brought on by Second World War.<sup>35</sup> From 1944, however, the transition to the republic and the encounter between the Italian Communist Party and the Southern peasants created great hopes, embodied by the dream of land redistribution. These hopes were raised notably through the projects of land reforms promoted by the PCI minister of Agriculture, Fausto Gullo, and through the actions of CGIL leader Giuseppe di Vittorio for the regulation of

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34 Teresa Noce (1974: 415-416) opposed the fact that UDI women called themselves "friends" (*amiche*) instead of "comrades" (*compagne*), since according to her the noun "*compagna*" had nothing to do with the "party line", but was rather a feminine noun, used to signify comradeship in the fight for emancipation and in antifascist battles. She also found most women in politics, in the UDI and in the trade unions too accommodating with male comrades. On this topic, she wrote an article entitled "Learning to say no", in which she argued that in order to achieve their emancipation as women and as workers, women had to learn to say no: to their teachers and parents, to their bosses, to their husbands, and to their comrades when they knew they were right.

35 A realistic portrait of the living conditions in the South under Fascism is drawn in Carlo Levi's masterpiece *Christ stopped at Eboli*, in which the communist intellectual and doctor recounts his years of forced confinement in two remote villages in the region of Basilicata. In his novel, Levi describes the indifference towards politics and the abyssal distance separating the Southern peasantry from the Italian state.

agricultural labour. As Ginsborg summarizes: in the South of Italy “too much of the best land was in too few hands and too many people had no land at all” (2003: 122). The underdevelopment and the miserable living standards of the Southern region were appalling, and the peasants were encouraged to mobilize collectively in order to ameliorate their living conditions.<sup>36</sup>

In the autumn of 1949-1950, a new wave of peasant protests started in Southern Italy, demanding land reform and redistribution as well as better working conditions for agricultural laborers. The previous attempts at reform undertaken in the years 1946-1947 under the government of antifascist unity had been put halted when the left was excluded from the government. The Christian-Democrats were, in fact, keen to reassure the Southern landowner elites. But the peasant mobilization started once again with an unprecedented participation in 1949. On the 24th of October, 24.000 peasants marched between Cosenza and Catanzaro:

Entire villages set out in procession, women with their children, some of the men on horseback and the red banners of the Communists often carried next to the portrait of the patron saint of the village. From the slopes of adjoining hills different columns of peasants would wave their banners at each other, as a greeting and as encouragement. When they arrived at the estates of the great landowners, the peasants meticulously pegged out and divided the land, and the work of preparation for sowing could then begin (Ginsborg 2003: 124).

Women had a very important role in the peasant protests: they put themselves in the front lines with the children, attempted to negotiate with the land-owners, and pretended to be faint or ill in order to distract the police. The repression was nonetheless very harsh: a few days later, three peasants, two young men and a young woman, were killed by a police gunshot in the town of Melissa on the 29th of October. Soon the movement spread from Calabria to all the regions of the South, with the slogan “the land to those who till it” (Ginsborg 2003: 124-125).

UDI and PCI leader Luciana Viviani tells in her autobiography of a peasant struggle that took place near Naples in the winter of 1949, when landless peasants set out to occupy land used for the pasturing of buffalo cows, whose milk was used to produce the well-known mozzarella. While the cows could profit from large expanses of land, the surrounding peasants starved, and felt less worthy than the cattle. When the movement for land occupation started, the peasants near Naples decided to occupy the land that had up to then been reserved to the cattle. Luciana Viviani was sent as a representative of the communist federation of Naples, to assist the peasants in their negotiations with the landowners. She mediated in one of these meetings, which hosted the landowners, the prefecture, the police, the trade unions and a delegation of peasants themselves.

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36 To give only one example, after the war “90 per cent of communes in Calabria had either no school buildings or schools housed in unhygienic conditions; 85 per cent of the communes were without drains and 81 per cent without adequate aqueducts; there was one hospital bed per 1500 inhabitants, and nearly 49 per cent of the adult population were illiterate” (Ginsborg 2003: 122).

The meeting continued for hours. While the landowners defended their right to exploit the land for agriculture, the trade union officers demanded some measures that would ameliorate the miserable lives of the peasants. The discussion became more and more violent, showing the “visceral hatred of the rich against the poor and the profound contempt of local squires for those ignorants in rags who expected to have something more than their parents and grandparents.” At a certain point, after hours of vain discussion, a peasant woman of an unknown age but worn out by labor, her hair hidden by a headscarf, came up to the table where the representatives were sitting. She took something out of her shawl, and threw on the table a package wrapped in newspaper. The package contained a piece of *polenta* (maize flour cooked in water), white and solidified. “This is all we have eaten since this morning”, the woman said. And then she returned to her place. According to Luciana Viviani, the intervention of the “woman with no name” was more efficient than all the trade unionists and left-wing politicians had done so far: after a moment of tense silence an agreement was reached, leading to the concession of parts of the land to the peasants’ cooperatives (Viviani 1994: 65-66).

The “woman with no name” in Viviani’s account symbolizes the encounter with rural women and men who for the first time felt that they could take part in politics, in order to achieve a better life. As Ginsborg recalls, the communist party elites played a very important role in promoting solidarity among the peasants, and in dismantling the traditional fatalism and individualism that had characterized their lives. The utopian character of the landless movements was very strong, due to a combination of communist ideals and pagan mysticism. Invoking the myth of the Soviet Union was a way to promote political solidarity among the peasants.<sup>37</sup> The Communist Party also used the Soviet myth in its attempts to moderate workers’ demands in order to comply with the law and avoid insurrectional demonstrations that might engender further repression against the workers’ movement. In January 1950 the police killed six workers and injured several hundreds during a demonstration held in the city of Modena against the purge of “undesirable” leftist workers from the *Fonderie Riunite* metallurgical factory. Between January 1948 and June 1950, 62 workers were killed, 3,126 injured and 92,169 arrested all over Italy. The majority of them identified themselves as communists. In this period, the UDI initiated a campaign against the police being allowed to carry weapons during street demonstrations.

The UDI could also make use of their solidarity networks between Northern and Southern Italy to support the struggle: in 1950, in the town of San Severo in the Southern region of Puglia, a strike of day labourers asking for “bread and work” turned

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37 “An extraordinary and exalted *fede pubblica* (...) was created. The organization and collective action of the peasantry would lead them into a new golden age. ‘Why’ asked the party of its militants, ‘are the workers in the Soviet Union masters of the factory and the peasants owners of the land they till? Why have the scourges of unemployment, prostitution and hunger disappeared? Why do women have the same wages as men for the same work? Why does the Russian people enjoy the greatest amount of liberty and the most democratic Constitution in the world?’ The answer lay in their discipline, their organization, their willingness to fight” (Ginsborg 2003: 126, reporting a leaflet of the Sicilian PCI section).

into a riot against the police. As a consequence, 180 people were arrested for “armed insurrection against the State”, and detained for two years before being tried and released. In the meantime, 70 children from San Severo were transferred among workers’ families in the North, thanks to the UDI’s longstanding network of assistance inaugurated in 1946. The same networks were activated after two major floods in the Polesine and Reggio Calabria regions in winter 1951, and hundreds of homeless children were transferred to Milan, Rome and other cities during the reconstruction work. The field of assistance to children in need, however, had become highly politicized, and UDI solidarity actions were opposed in many ways by the government and by the police, and were the object of fierce anti-communist accusations in the press. In the late 1940s and early 1950s, in fact, the Christian-Democratic government gradually withdrew the funding assigned to leftist associations, thus ensuring a Catholic monopoly on education, assistance and social work (Rodano 2010: 71-73).

In this section I have explored a variety of grassroots activities promoted by the UDI among peasants in Southern Italy. In the next section I will deal with another campaign launched by the UDI in the early Cold War period, that is the support to women victims of war rape in Central Italy.

### 2.3. The UDI support of of war rape victims in Cassino province

During the advancement of the Allied troops in Central Italy in the summer of 1944, thousands of women and men living in the province of Cassino were victims of war rapes by French Moroccan troops of the French Expeditionary Corps, known as *Goumiers*. In the first village encountered by the troops, the village of Esperia, 700 women were raped out of a total of 2500 inhabitants, and several relatives were killed for having opposed the violence. This theme was portrayed several years later in the novel *La Ciociara* by Alberto Moravia and in the well-known movie of the same title. Several years later, 60.000 women – commonly defined as *Marocchine* (literally: Moroccan) – were still suffering from venereal diseases, and had not received any compensation or adequate assistance from the state. A public meeting organized by the UDI took place in Pontecorvo in October 1951, with 500 women delegates from Central Italy. In 1952 UDI President and communist MP Maria Maddalena Rossi<sup>38</sup> raised the issue in Parliament, asking for invalidity pensions and specialized health care for the women in the villages affected by the war rapes. Former UDI members have argued in recent years that in the 1950s UDI campaign there was no reference to the sexist nature

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38 Maria Maddalena Rossi (1906-1995) was born in a middle class family in Northern Italy, and graduated in chemistry. In 1937 she became member of the clandestine PCI in Milan. Later, she went into exile in Switzerland where she continued to organize antifascist activities. In December 1944 she returned to Milan where she joined the clandestine editorial board of the newspaper *L'Unità*. In 1946 she was elected as communist delegate to the Constituent Assembly. She was President of the UDI from 1947 to 1956 and vice-president of the WIDF from 1957 until 1967.

of these events (Michetti, Repetto and Viviani 1998: 53), or that even UDI members saw war rapes mainly as a crime against honor (Rodano 2010: 76).

Maria Maddalena Rossi's speech, however, repeatedly made use of a language that highlighted the specificity of the experience lived by women victims of rape. She also expressed a profound solidarity with the women she claimed to represent in Parliament. After having described some individual cases of violence, she referred to how old and young women coped with the rapes:

Many of these old women are ill: they are slowly dying because of the ugly disease transmitted by the Moroccan soldiers. Upon entering their miserable huts one can see these poor old women on their beds of rags, with children around them, with the relatives who aren't able to cure them. And these old women talk, telling what happened to them. Not so for the young women; the young women, in general, are unwilling to speak, and one can well understand why. If for the old women the insult has almost the character of a martyrdom, for the young ones it signifies something worse than death: it signifies to have a long span of life in front of oneself, a life not yet lived, but dark and cold, in which there is no glimmer, no hope, no light; they have lost the possibility of having a family, of having children; they are even prevented from working, and the poverty in their case is even more tragic, since economic well-being could at least help them to get out of this terrible isolation in which their disgrace has thrown them.<sup>39</sup>

In Rossi's speech one can get a measure of the shame and stigma affecting these women, and of the way in which war rapes were interpreted at the time in the Italian Parliament. While sharing the general idea that for these women rape was something worse than death because of its moral implications, Maria Maddalena Rossi attempted to break the isolation surrounding this phenomenon and asked for special provisions that could partially improve their lives: "That's why today we say to the Government: apply the existing laws, that until now haven't been applied as they should have been; but also: study some special provisions for this horrible mutilation caused by war, study something different for this different evil, different from the other grave ones left to heal by the war." Rossi asked therefore for a special compensation for these women, on the basis of their unique experience as victims of war rapes. It is possible to sense here an intuition of these women's need to obtain some specific care, but the idea of psychological help was not mentioned. The demand for health care was related instead to the spread of venereal diseases.

The communist MP also denounced in Parliament the public hypocrisy towards the fate of these women, and the double standards implied in the concept of "morality". She emphasized that the scandal wasn't women's denunciation of war rapes, but rather the hidden social injustice they experienced as female victims living in the periphery of the country: "I know that some pretend to be scandalized since we have taken the defense of these women in Parliament and in the country. I believe, instead,

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39 Maria Maddalena Rossi, parliamentary intervention, 7 April 1952. The text of the intervention is available on the website of the Italian Senate. [www.senato.it](http://www.senato.it)

that we should be scandalized because among us some people would like to cover up with a veil of silence this disgrace, this awful crime committed against innocent women, young girls, profiting from the fact that they live far from the big cities, in far away villages.”<sup>40</sup> The Christian-Democratic government, however, was reluctant to approve any special provision for these cases, also since they suspected that the numbers of rape victims had been inflated in order to obtain pensions and compensations in villages that were in a state of extreme misery. According to the spokesperson of the government, MP Tessitori, only 20.000 compensation requests had been deposited after 1944 and there were no more women with venereal diseases in the area. The spokesperson of the government was thus keen to dismiss the specificity of war rapes, and the need for a specific compensation. He compared the fate of these women to the fate of those who have lost a son or husband in war, stating that in any case no monetary compensation can possibly heal their pain.

Maria Maddalena Rossi reacted to these statements with indignation. She pointed to the insensitivity of the male MP towards the issue (“We really can see that you are not a woman!”), and underlined that these crimes could not be compared to other war losses:

No, it is not the same thing. We know the mothers who have lost their sons, the wives who have lost their husbands: we love them, honor them, demonstrate our full solidarity, so that they sometimes can find comfort in the fact that their mourning is shared, that the memory of their beloved is sacred to millions of citizens. But not for these women! For them there’s no possible comfort. They have to hide, as if they are infected even on a moral level! Some would like to forbid these women from talking of their disgrace, from gathering, from making claims, in the name of public morality! <sup>41</sup>

Rossi accused the government representative of cynicism and insensitivity since he “did not find this violence more horrific and more repellant than any other violence that war can bring”; she promised that the PCI would propose another law establishing “a special treatment, different from the others, for these victims, who are victims different from others.”<sup>42</sup>

The campaign for women victims of rape contains all the elements characterizing the UDI in these years: a strong engagement in the field of social assistance, their support of grassroots movements, and their efforts as representatives in the parliamentary arena to achieve laws and welfare provisions that could respond to some of the pressing social demands that existed in Italy at the time. In the same era, in 1948, the socialist MP Lina Merlin proposed the abolition of the “closed houses” (*case chiuse*), the state-managed brothels that employed thousands of women. This system allowed all sorts of police and medical abuses of prostitutes, who were described as propagators of venereal disease. Prostitutes were registered on a special list and were deprived

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40 Ibidem.

41 Ibidem.

42 Ibidem.

of civil rights. Senator Lina Merlin opposed the system as “unacceptable from the point of view of legality and equality between the sexes”, but also as “unacceptable from the point of view of civilization, human dignity and the prestige of the female sex”, since it reified men’s rights to exploit women under state control, and condoned a form of sexual slavery based on the supposed need to protect public morality (Michetti, Repetto and Viviani 1998: 385-391). The “closed houses” were finally abolished ten years later, in 1958.<sup>43</sup>

These two campaigns show that while adopting a class-based analysis, UDI leaders were sensitive to issues of violence against women, and that they were aware that women victims of violence required specialized assistance. In the next sections I will look at the way in which UDI leaders discussed their engagement between “work among women” and “party work” in the early Cold War period.

#### 2.4. Feminist historiography and the debate on the autonomy of the UDI

In the previous chapter I have described some of the activities conducted by the UDI at the national level in the early Cold War period, focusing on grassroots campaigns and activities promoting women’s rights, particularly for workers and peasants. As shown in the previous section, class-based activism did not mean that specific women’s interests were abandoned. By working to improve welfare provisions, to eliminate extreme poverty and stamp out labor exploitation, the UDI attempted to respond to women’s needs. The “differential associations” (*associazioni differenziali*) allowed the UDI to take root at the local level, among rice-weeders, olive pickers, seasonal labourers, sharecroppers, home-workers, and housewives. Many women from working class or peasant backgrounds became aware of their rights and of politics for the first time, by participating in petitions for world peace. For many women the local UDI section provided a solidarity network, a place to socialize, and a regular occasion to step out of the home. More ethnographies of local grassroots activism are needed on this subject, to assess the significance of the organization at the local level and for its rank-and-file members.<sup>44</sup>

Within feminist historiography, however, the activism of the UDI in the early Cold War years has been read within the framework of a loss of autonomy, due to UDI subordination to the strategy of the communist and socialist parties. At the end of 1947, in fact, the organization entered the “Popular Democratic Front for Freedom,

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43 As shown in the interviews collected by Pasolini in his 1965 documentary about sexuality in Italy, *Comizi d’Amore*, this law did not prevent many Italian men from being nostalgic for the old system, since the *case chiuse* represented a masculine rite of passage, and preserved the widespread sexist double standard.

44 For an ethnography of the UDI in Emilia-Romagna based on oral history interviews conducted mainly with rank-and-file members, see Liotti et al. 2002. According to Rosangela Pesenti, who writes in this same volume, the UDI has been largely under-researched also because of the working class and peasant character of the vast majority of its members, which, as a result, produced fewer “intellectuals” than the feminist generation (Pesenti 2002: 79-85).

Labor and Peace”, the coalition created by the PCI and the PSI – together with other minor parties – forming a “Feminine Alliance for the Front” and inviting its members to support the Popular Front in 1948 elections. According to historical interpretations, including those written by former UDI leaders (Michetti, Repetto and Viviani 1998; Rodano 2010), the support for the Popular Front marked the lowest point of autonomy in the history of the UDI. The constant overlapping of the activities of the Popular Front, the Alliance with its “differential associations” and the UDI created confusion, and a loss of specificity in terms of gender-oriented goals.

In these early Cold War years, in fact, even the words “woman” and “emancipation” disappeared from the agenda of the UDI (see Michetti, Repetto and Viviani 1998, 314-315; see Rodano 2010, 61-80).<sup>45</sup> According to these interpretations, the UDI of these years had somehow lost its original goal of struggling autonomously for the emancipation of all women. Because of its open position in support of the Communist and Socialist parties in the midst of a conservative backlash, the UDI wasn’t an association of “left-wing women for women” any more, but had become an association of “women for the left” (Michetti, Repetto and Viviani 1998: 27). Words like “women’s emancipation” and “autonomy” came back onto the agenda only after the mid-1950s, as I will show in the next chapter.

While offering a glimpse of the political climate of the early Cold War years, these reconstructions of the history of the UDI tend to build a retrospective, teleological narrative of *loss* and *return* of autonomy (Hemmings 2011). This narrative describes “the originary” UDI as an autonomous and spontaneous organization in 1944-1945. According to the narrative, this autonomy is subsequently lost in the early Cold War years between 1948 and 1953; from 1953 onwards the value of women’s emancipation is gradually rediscovered, until the encounter with feminism in the 1970s. As in the case of the dissolution of the AFŽ in Yugoslavia, these historical interpretations – mediated by second wave feminist theory – risks oversimplifying the complex, multi-layered political decisions and strategies in which the UDI was entangled.

These historical narratives have also been adopted by former UDI members to react to the new feminist paradigm that dominated Italian women’s history from the late 1970s, and as a reaction towards post-1989 anti-communism. Both paradigms – the feminist and the anti-communist – had the tendency to discredit the UDI for its lack of autonomy, describing it as a “chain of transmission” of Italian Communist Party politics (itself dominated by guidelines from Moscow). UDI leaders and intellectuals have thus attempted to preserve a positive image of the organization by emphasizing instances of gender-based consciousness and political autonomy from party politics that were present in the organization since its beginnings, and which became more prominent from the mid-1950s onwards.

The problem with this interpretation is that the term *autonomy* had a radically different meaning when used in the late 1940s and 1950s within the context of the

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45 The Second UDI Congress – held in Milan, 19-23 October 1947 – was significantly titled “For a happy family, for peace, and for work”, while the slogan of the Third Congress in 1949 was “For the future of our children, for freedom and progress, no to war” (Michetti, Repetto and Viviani 1998: 21).



UDI. The discussion of the autonomy of the UDI in the late 1940s and 1950s, in fact, was not a discussion that opposed female militants to male party leaders, but rather a discussion between two opposed political currents existing within the Italian Communist Party, a current marked by Togliatti's moderate strategy, and a current striving for a more revolutionary, class-based strategy. At the height of Cold War tensions, the survival of the communist movement in Italy was threatened – as shown by the attempted assassination of Togliatti in 1948 – and the UDI became embedded in these pressing debates on political strategy, at the national and international level.

Two different political lines about women's organizations – although never clearly defined – existed within the party: one was the Togliatti line of “progressive democracy”, which included the alliance between the communist and the socialist party. The creation of a unitary, women-only organization like the UDI has to be situated within this project. According to Togliatti, the question of women's emancipation, like the “Southern question”, had to do with the democratization of Italian society, and was transversal to class struggle. Togliatti regularly defended the need for a nation-wide, unitary, autonomous women's organization, against those members of the party (women included) who saw the organization as a pure “transmission belt” (see Rodano 2010: 53-55). The other more radical current of the party, guided by hardliner Pietro Secchia, was, in fact, eager to use the UDI as a vehicle for propaganda and electoral politics, and to dismiss it as useless when these goals were not met. This line prevailed in the early Cold War years, when the communists and socialists were no longer part of the antifascist unitary government, and when a number of militants regarded Togliatti's national unity strategy as failed (see Rodano 2010: 60-61).

As in Yugoslavia, the internal discussions about the need for a women-only organization were highly dependent on matters of political strategy. They also shifted according to the different loyalties of the female leaders: many communist leaders worked simultaneously as party functionaries, within the Feminine Commissions of the Party, and within the UDI. Some communist militants, like Teresa Noce, rejected separate women's organizations, while others felt “at home” in the UDI (see for instance Ombra 2009). Mutual connections also existed at the base. In the “red” regions, such as Emilia-Romagna, the local grassroots and cultural activity of the PCI, the UDI, and the trade unions frequently overlapped with each other, constituting a specific working-class subculture (Kertzer 1996; see also Liotti et al. 2002). In any case, the activities of the UDI were never separate from the activities of the Popular Front or of the Communist Party in the late 1940s and early 1950s. This does not mean, as I have indicated also for the AFŽ, that its members did not exert forms of individual political agency, nor that the organization simply executed party directives, nor that conflicts between male and female activists were absent (about the communist party's double standards towards male and female comrades, see for instance Ombra 2009; Bellassai 2000).

The archives testifying of the relations between the UDI, the PCI and the Feminine Commissions of the PCI have not been studied in depth, but seem worthwhile considering when dealing with issues of autonomy and control. A “Note on the functioning of Women's Commissions” produced in 1950 is explicit about the directive role of PCI Women's Commissions with respect to the UDI. In 1945, each section of the

party included two women constituting the local feminine commission, one dealing with party work and “women’s cells”, the other dealing with “mass work among women,” that is, “the section (*circolo*) of the UDI”. This, however, brought “confusion” and “overlap” between the women’s PCI cells and the UDI sections, with the result that “the comrades could not understand the difference between the UDI and the Party and thus the necessity and the importance of establishing a strong mass organization.”<sup>46</sup>

While praising the results of the Women’s Commissions (increasing PCI membership, strengthening communist women’s activism in the UDI, forming militant cadres), the document stressed the limits of these Commissions. As in the case of the AFŽ, the document denounced the fact that the Party “doesn’t yet consider work among women among its fundamental tasks”, and thus “many women’s initiatives – even when they are well implemented – are seen as done for their own sake, without a larger political perspective for the widening and strengthening of the women’s movement and for the influence that this can exert on the development of the democratic movement in general.” Since the Party largely ignored “women’s issues”, the members of the Women’s Commissions felt “isolated”. The risk of creating a “Party within the Party” with little influence was apparent. As in the case of the AFŽ, communist women were in charge of “work among women” with a certain degree of freedom and decision-making, but this freedom was due to the fact that the Party preferred to delegate these “secondary issues”, rather than engaging with them on a systemic level.

A report on the Women’s Commissions in the city of Bologna, accompanying the previous “Note on the functioning of Women’s Commissions”<sup>47</sup>, denounced the high amount of work required from the communist women, who under extreme pressure juggled the coordination of all the different activities of the PCI and UDI sections. They were also in charge of the women’s cells in each section, and in addition, dealt with trade unions, work cooperatives and so on. In this way, the female militants,

became indeed good plodders, and also excellent executors of the directives, but [...] did their work in a mechanical way, without reflecting on what they were doing, due to the many problems they had to face. But the most negative aspect manifested in the lack of a concrete study of women’s problems, in a superficial knowledge of women’s life and work conditions in our province, in the scarce reflection on how to apply the political line of the Party in a concrete way, that adheres to reality.<sup>48</sup>

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46 “Note sul funzionamento delle Commissioni Femminili”, dalla introduzione alla riunione di Commissione Femminile Centrale del 29.9. 1950. Istituto Gramsci Rome, MF. busta 233, fascicolo 17, sezione femminile 1949-1950.

47 “La funzione delle Commissioni Femminili”, di Vittorina dal Monte Responsabile della Commissione Femminile della Federazione di Bologna. Istituto Gramsci Rome, MF. busta 233, fascicolo 17, sezione femminile 1949-1950.

48 “E’ fuori dubbio che questo nostro cattivo metodo di lavoro si faceva sentire in tutta la nostra attività in direzione delle masse femminili e soprattutto nei risultati. Prima di tutto esso si risentiva nella formazione dei nostri quadri femminili che diventavano sì delle buone sgobbone (...) ma che svolgevano il loro lavoro in modo meccanico, senza riflettere su quanto facevano, dovuto ai numerosi problemi che esse dovevano affrontare. Ma l’aspetto più negativo si mani-

The fragmentation of decision-making was overwhelming to the militants, and was at odds with another important necessity, the need to “adhere to reality” and to respond to women’s different needs. The party propaganda had become too “generic,” lacking a true understanding of the problems of the “different social strata in our province” and offering the same “speech” to bourgeois city women and countryside day labourers.

In order to overcome this situation, similar to the problems the AFŽ faced in the early 1950s, the Women’s Commissions from Bologna proposed to “mainstream” women’s issues within every party organ – thus engaging the whole Party on the women’s issues in each of its sections and work commissions. Many comrades from the Women’s Commissions were sent to work directly within the party, the UDI, the trade unions, and the cooperatives. In this way, these women could become “political cadres and not just women [cadres], with a less unilateral preparation that also helps them in the work of directing women.” This passage hints at the inferior valuation of “work among women”, seen as “feminine” and less political. Female leaders refused to be limited to a task that seemed extremely hard to achieve due to the disinterest of male comrades. But the goal of “making the entire Party responsible for women’s work” was met with “difficulty and incomprehension”, notably from the base.

The widespread sexism of Italian society was reflected also within the party. Many men opposed women’s presence in the public sphere and in party politics – as well as women’s right to work, notably when it came to their own wives. As in AFŽ reports, in fact, PCI and UDI reports and publications testify to the hegemony of the breadwinner in the family, and to the widespread character of violence against women, even in the families of men who were party members. A former militant, Giovanni Cesareo, relates that at that time, in a PCI section in the center of Rome, people said “oh! The comrade is very good, he attends the party school, he knows things, he’s very open, and then he goes home and beats his wife. That was the idea. There was a world divided in two, politically at the Section all were like this, but at home...there was really a neat division” (quoted in Casalini 2010: 155). The idea that “beating up one’s wife isn’t a private matter”, but amounts to a “feudal conception of the family”, as PCI leader Ruggero Grieco insisted, was received with difficulty by many party members, who saw these habits as “natural” (Bellassai 2000: 213-218).

From these reports one can assess the coexistence of instances of modernization of gender relations – inaugurated with women’s participation in the Resistance and continued in their engagement in postwar politics alongside their male comrades – and the persistence of a long-standing traditionalism that was also reflected within the party. As Bellassai (2000: 147) notes, “the communist representation of the family, on the one hand, recalls, even with pride, (...) some images taken from the austere and healthy proletarian morality (in which, really, the popular accents cannot be neatly distinguished from the patriarchal ones); on the other hand, it cannot be simply

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festava nella mancanza di uno studio concreto dei problemi femminili, in una conoscenza superficiale delle condizioni di vita e di lavoro nella nostra provincia, nella poca meditazione del come applicare la linea politica del Partito in un modo concreto e aderente alla realtà.” Ibidem.

defined as conservative.” In her work on communist families Maria Casalini (2010) similarly shows the ambivalent coexistence of progressive and traditional gender relations within communist households.

In the late 1940s and early 1950s, women’s desire for individual self-expression and autonomy were gradually emerging, challenging traditional Italian views of family and society, in which women could only be wives, mothers, or daughters. This is well illustrated in the 1952 novel *Quaderno Proibito* (the Forbidden Diary), by feminist writer Alba De Cespedes, in which a forty-year-old woman is able to express the gap between her family role and her individual desires and personality only when she starts to keep a secret diary, which she doesn’t know where to hide since she has literally no space for herself in the house. As noted by Piccone-Stella (1981: 28), in the 1950s women’s self-expression was highly tamed, and the range of permitted behaviours was very restricted. A strong individual personality was enough to cross the line, and to be admonished by male relatives and public authorities.

For many communist women, the choice of dealing with party politics had been based on a “personal revolution”, achieved by transgressing widespread social norms. The individual choice to take part in politics formed part of a process of self-realization, and made these women conscious of their “difference” from other women, who stayed away from politics and the public sphere (Bellassai 2000: 266-7). At the same time – and this is worth noting when discussing an issue like women’s individual and collective autonomy in relation to the party – the communist doctrine of collective sacrifice was ill equipped to give voice to women’s individual aspirations. Party ethics rejected individualism as a “bourgeois” vice and promoted the notion of collective sacrifice for male and female militants alike.<sup>49</sup> Self-sacrifice, heroism, and abnegation to the collective were key values in twentieth century communist culture.<sup>50</sup>

For women, this ethic included the necessity to “give the example” in the realm of morals, therefore adopting the gendered double standard permeating Italian society. In their identity as both communists and women, therefore, female militants were submitted to a double bind, being required to embody an irreproachable example not only as militants, but as women, too. In their daily lives they needed to “reconcile these two universes, so distant in the collective imagination: the militant and the woman, the first confined to the public sphere, the other to the private sphere” (Gabrielli, quoted in Bellassai 2000: 265). The figure of the emancipated woman, thus, also had to encompass the traditional female figure, according to the model of the

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49 As recounted with irony by Luciana Viviani in her 1994 autobiographical stories, the need to strengthen the spirit of sacrifice led to some absurd situations in the PCI school for young male and female cadres in 1950, modelled after similar schools in the USSR. The PCI school encouraged a collective ritual of self-critique, particularly from those who came from “bourgeois” families. Another task was to carry heavy stones in the garden, for no reason other than to learn about the heaviness of manual labor. The young students subsequently invented a series of songs in which they made fun of the rules of the school, and of their teachers (Viviani 1994: 79-89).

50 As shown by historian Jolande Withuis (1990), a comparable ethic of heroism and sacrifice was present among Dutch communist women during the Cold War period.

“harmonious balance”<sup>51</sup> (Piccone Stella 1981: 23). Often communist militants felt torn between these two dimensions, since they were forced to “neglect” the home and the family in order to attend meetings and travel around the country. Nonetheless, they tried to keep everything together, as former partisan commander Laura Polizzi did, who only found the time to do household chores at night (Liotti et al. 2002).

Historians underline on the one hand the break with previous symbolic norms exemplified by the small number of “emancipated” women, who “established, with their behavior, that it was possible to be different” (Signorelli, quoted in Bellassai 2000: 267). At the same time, they stress that these exceptional life paths were the result of a specific historical moment determined by the Second World War and the Resistance, which could not be repeated. The “heroism” and “seriousness” displayed by communist women during the Resistance were offered as models for daily life in the postwar period, generating a great desire for escapism and distraction among younger generations, who found themselves in a completely different situation from the Resistance heroines (Piccone-Stella 1981).

In the late 1940s and early 1950s, UDI magazine *Noi Donne* had to adapt itself to the changes in society and to the desires of the new generation, more interested in photostory magazines such as *Grand Hotel* than in international politics. The political articles became rarer, and the magazine was increasingly filled with beauty tips, recipes, sewing models and stories about Hollywood movie stars. As in the case of the AFŽ press, these changes in the UDI press – and its focus on “lighter” subjects – did not automatically amount to a patriarchal backlash, but also served to express a desire for a better, “civilized” life, a wish to “emancipate oneself from peasant culture” (Bellassai, 2000: 259).

When the Italian political climate started to relax, in the mid-1950s, the UDI found the necessary space to reopen the discussion about the priorities of the organization and on its relationship with the communist and socialist parties. Its magazine *Noi Donne* started its famous fieldwork inquiries into women’s lives, denouncing poverty, domestic violence, sexist attitudes in the workplace, and launching a campaign for family planning. In the next chapter I will discuss the period of de-Stalinization, which marked an increasing focus on gender-based concerns at the national and international levels.

## Conclusion

In this chapter I have analysed the activities of the Yugoslav AFŽ and the Italian UDI between 1948 and 1953. Due to the immense amount of material, for the sake of comparison I have selected some of the most relevant campaigns conducted by the AFŽ and the UDI, showing how these organizations attempted to respond to women’s everyday needs in a situation of postwar poverty, illiteracy and underdevelopment, no-

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51 “L’emancipazione non conduceva all’antagonismo, anzi: le donne emancipate hanno più cose da dare ai loro uomini, sono migliori educatrici dei figli, collaboratrici intelligenti e solide” (Piccone Stella 1981: 25).

tably in the countryside and in the less developed areas of Yugoslavia and Italy. In the case of the AFŽ, I have focused on the campaign against the full Islamic veil, as well as on the campaign for health education and sanitation in Kosovo. In the case of the UDI, my analysis addresses the campaigns for the rights of agricultural workers and factory workers, as well as the organization's of the peasants' land movement in Southern Italy. The UDI's support for the women who had been victims of war rapes in the region of Cassino is also described in detail. In all of these cases, I have highlighted the "long and tiring work" and the many difficulties faced by AFŽ and UDI activists, who represented an educated, politicized avant-garde trying to grapple with women's inferior position in all aspects of cultural, economic and social life.

While the documents analyzed here have been produced by high-ranking and mid-ranking militants, some "voices from below" made their way into the reports, showing the constant social interaction between the leadership and the "feminine masses". These interactions sometimes included the making of a full-veiled, Kosovo girl into a respected teacher and AFŽ militant, or brought for the first time an anonymous peasant woman into a political meeting in the South of Italy. Since AFŽ and UDI militants were striving to "adhere to reality", and studied women's lives in depth in order to develop social interventions, the documents produced by these organizations are invaluable sources about gender relationships and women's lives in the postwar and Cold War period.

As demonstrated in this chapter on the basis of a wide array of archive material, UDI and AFŽ activists were not blind to violence against women or to the sexual division of labour that existed at all levels of society. Women's inferior position was taken, in accordance with Marxist theory, as a sign of general backwardness – patriarchal behaviors in fact are often described with words such as "feudalism" or "superstition" – which could only be overcome through economic progress, political organizing and education, of both men and women. UDI and AFŽ militants had been trained to think of social change – including change in family relationships – in collective terms, as a result of general economic and political change. During their work in the field, however, the antifascist militants were confronted with everyday sexism and discrimination, and realized that changes in family customs and interpersonal relations proceeded at a slower pace than other changes. While being in charge of "work among women" on behalf of the party, they often had to face sexism and double standards by their male comrades at the local level.

Loyal to their party engagement, but having developed a solidarity with "the feminine masses", antifascist leaders attempted to overcome the marginalization of women's problems within their respective parties. They proposed "mainstreaming" women's issues at all levels of the party, persuaded that women's inferior status could be overcome if the "women's question" was embraced by the party as a social, universal question, which involved men and women alike. This wasn't an easy task. Both the Yugoslav and the Italian communist parties, in fact, were eager to comply with existing traditional moral standards in order to gain popular legitimacy. While Marxist theory had challenged for the first time the idea that family relationships were immutable, its 1940s Stalinist version was ill equipped to develop a critique of men's

“natural” primacy within the family. “Natural” sexual and family roles were mostly seen as a given in the Italian and Yugoslav peasant societies of the late 1940s and early 1950s, permeated as they were with religious traditions, sexism and pro-natalism.

I argue in this chapter that while operating in extremely difficult conditions, the AFŽ and the UDI became important agents of progress, modernization and social change with regard to gender relations and women’s lives in Italy and Yugoslavia in the early Cold War period. In this chapter I take a critically stance towards prevailing feminist historiography, which has largely interpreted the Cold War period as one of conservatism and moderation, and which has read women’s activism in this period as moderate or conservative, due to the lack of autonomy of women’s organizations from communist and socialist parties. As shown in these pages, the lack of autonomy of women’s organizations did not prevent their members from exerting political agency at a collective and individual level, and from improving women’s life conditions on a great scale. I have contended that the problem of separate women’s organization vs. universal party work cannot be limited to an issue of women’s autonomy vs. state (or party) control, as it is often interpreted retrospectively, judging these organizations against the backdrop of second wave feminist paradigms. These organizations, instead, have to be understood in their relation to party politics and to state power.

As demonstrated in this chapter, Cold War women’s organizations in Italy and Yugoslavia cannot be seen as simple “chains of transmission”, or as monolithic entities. Political divisions and differences existed between communist parties and women’s organizations, between male and female militants, but also within parties and within women’s organizations. Women took different sides and expressed their various political subjectivities, often advocating women’s rights from within and through party structures, and just as often advocating these same rights through the work of the AFŽ and the UDI. For AFŽ and UDI leaders in the late 1940s and early 1950s, a struggle for women’s rights and women’s emancipation was simply inconceivable outside the framework of existing political parties and state institutions. This faith in state-based modernization and in political institutions is, in my view, what differentiated the anti-fascist generation from the feminist movements that emerged in Yugoslavia and Italy after 1968. By the 1970s, in fact, the faith in postwar states and in their modernizing effects had been put into question from different sides.<sup>52</sup>

While in this chapter I explored the activities of the UDI and the AFŽ at the local level, in the next chapter I will move once again towards an exploration of Italo-Yugoslav transnational connections. I shall examine women’s transnational activism in Cold War Italy and Yugoslavia, looking at the impact of the de-Stalinization process of

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52 The faith in state-driven modernization was challenged, for instance, by environmentalist movements, after a series of environmental disasters caused by state modernization, such as the disaster of Vajont in Italy. The institution of labour and its supposed emancipatory effects were also put into question by various student, artistic and political movements across Europe. A case in point is the philosophy of Italian *operaismo*, or workerism, which pointed at the exploitative character and at the conflictual elements present in labour relations. In Yugoslavia, as mentioned in Chapter 1, a critique of the authoritarian state was formulated mainly by the 1968 student movement and in the philosophical arena, as well as in the visual arts, and in cinema.

1955-1956 on the Union of Italian Women and the Union of Women's Societies (SDŽ) of Yugoslavia. I will interrogate once again the meaning of the concept of autonomy within the framework of the transnational dialogues established between the UDI and the SDŽ in 1956-1957. This concept, in fact, gained in importance within the UDI from the mid-1950s, and was the object of a transnational discussion between Italian and Yugoslav leaders in 1956-1957, within the framework of a critique of the methods of the Women's International Democratic Federation (WIDF).



## Chapter 7

### After 1956: national ways to women's emancipation

I am not satisfied with a way of acting that seems to say:  
"Now that Stalin is dead [...] everything will be all right."  
(Laura Weiss, 1956)

In 1956, after two decades in which the "personality cult" of Stalin had widely been promoted in the international communist movement, Khrushchev's denounced the crimes committed under Stalinism in his "Secret Speech" at the Twentieth Congress of the Soviet Communist Party. During the Congress, Khrushchev also stated that the expulsion of Yugoslavia from the socialist bloc had been a Stalinist plot. The first signs of Soviet-Yugoslav reconciliation had been expressed the year before, in June 1955, when Khrushchev paid a visit to Tito in Belgrade. As a consequence of reconciliation between the Soviet Union and Yugoslavia, the bilateral relations between the Italian Communist Party and the League of communists of Yugoslavia were re-established, and the former "Titoist" traitors that had been expelled in 1948 were readmitted once more into the socialist camp. As a result of these events, from the mid-1950s the co-operation between antifascist women's organizations in Italy and Yugoslavia was re-established, after almost eight years of conflict.

In the Italo-Yugoslav border area, however, where the fight between pro-Cominform and pro-Tito partisans had divided the local leftist forces – including women's organizations – the new "Truth" of Soviet-Yugoslav reconciliation was ill-accepted. These shifts in the official 'Truth' promoted by the Soviet Union and by the Italian Communist Party were strongly resented by Triestine UDAIS leader Laura Weiss. Laura Weiss could not come to terms with the de-Stalinization process, nor with the new Soviet line about Yugoslavia. In 1956 she wrote to Vittorio Vidali that perhaps it was time for her to leave the communist party, since "[i]t is for me inconceivable that in the USSR there was a situation of such terror that leaders can be exempted from responsibility of having accepted leadership methods that contrasted with our principles for 20 years [from 1936 till 1956], and that no one raised their voice (...). I am not satisfied with a way of acting that seems to say: *now that Stalin is dead (...) everything will be all right.*" Weiss said that the idea of a 'politically useful' truth – which included the recent rehabilitation of Tito, after years of violent rivalries between pro-Cominform and pro-Tito militants in Trieste – had become 'unbearable' for her, and that therefore she might leave the communist party.<sup>1</sup>

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1 In the end Weiss remained in the party, but was somehow marginalised over the years,

The year 1956 was a watershed for many communist party members in Italy. Khrushchev's "secret speech" caused bewilderment and confusion among rank-and-file militants, since "the PCI base had been led to believe by their own leaders that the Soviet camp was a land of milk and honey for the working class (Urban 1986: 238). The fact that PCI leader Togliatti denied to have known anything about Stalin's crimes, moreover, was shocking to many high ranking party members (Rossanda 2005). Many militants, particularly intellectuals, left the party at the end of 1956, when the PCI failed to condemn the Soviet intervention in the Hungarian uprising. During the Soviet intervention, Giuseppe di Vittorio, the popular leader of the left-wing trade union, the CGIL, had expressed his solidarity with the Hungarian workers, and had claimed that the Soviet intervention violated the principle of autonomy of socialist states. Di Vittorio was forced to rectify his position, while other intellectuals such as Italo Calvino, Delio Cantinori, Franco Fortini and others chose to leave the party, which lost around 400.000 members between 1955 and 1957 (Ginsborg 2003: 207).

The "epistemological rupture" of "the unforgettable" year 1956 caused considerable soul-searching and disquiet<sup>2</sup>, but it also had lasting political consequences for the Italian left. Among Italian militants, the dogmatic belief in the Communist Party of the Soviet Union had been put into question. New possibilities for debate opened up within the Italian Communist Party, as evidenced by a recent memoir of workerist philosopher Mario Tronti.<sup>3</sup> The stormy debates that raged in the communist and socialist parties provoked a shift also within the UDI. The organization in fact started developing a new policy of organizational autonomy with respect to political parties at the national level, and a critical line towards the Women's International Democratic Federation at the international level.

In their critique of the WIDF, which mainly consisted of challenging Soviet hegemony within the organization, Italian women found common ground with Yugoslav antifascist female leaders, who had been expelled from the WIDF in 1949. After the Soviet-Yugoslav reconciliation in 1956, the WIDF invited Yugoslav representatives to join the Federation once more. As shown in this chapter, however, the representatives of Yugoslavia maintained a critical position towards the WIDF. Both Italian and Yugoslav women's organizations, therefore, found themselves in a critical posi-

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due to her critical position towards the national PCI leadership based in Rome. See Andri et al. 2007: 117, 147. The original letter is deposited at the Laura Weiss collection, f44, d961, Istituto Livio Saranz, Trieste.

2 Rossana Rossanda – similarly to Weiss – recalls the disillusionment towards the Soviet Union and its leadership, as well as the disappointment towards the PCI approval of the Soviet intervention in Hungary. The atmosphere within the party was so stressful that Rossanda's hair turned white at that time, at the age of 32 (see Rossanda 2005: 175-176).

3 Tronti (2012: 2) recalls: "One key date emerges as a strategic locus for us all: 1956. Several things made that year 'unforgettable', but I would stress the transition – in effect, an epistemological rupture – from a party truth to a class truth. The time span from the Soviet Twentieth Party Congress to the Hungarian events constituted a sequence of leaps in the awareness of a young generation of intellectuals. I sensed, before I consciously thought it, that the twentieth century ended there. We awoke from the dogmatic slumber of historicity."

tion towards the WIDF from the mid-1950s onwards. The cooperation between Italian and Yugoslav women's organizations reflected the renewed convergence between the Italian Communist Party and the Yugoslav League of Communists on the topic of "national ways to socialism". Let me briefly recapitulate the geopolitical context of the mid-1950s, and let me clarify the importance of the doctrine of "national ways to socialism" in Yugoslavia and Italy, before discussing the connections between Italian and Yugoslav women's organizations.

After the death of Stalin and with the beginning of the de-Stalinization process, socialist movements and communist parties in Western and Eastern Europe started to question Soviet hegemony, and to explore possible "national ways to socialism", that is, ways to achieve the socialist economic system in a way adapted to the specific historical conditions and needs of their respective nations. A "national way" to development and sovereignty was also advocated by the leaders of newly independent Asian and African states, who met for the first time at the Bandung conference, in 1955.<sup>4</sup> Yugoslavia had a crucial role in these geopolitical exchanges, since it embodied the possibility of achieving a socialist system without the patronage of the Soviet Union, and in opposition to Western imperialism. Jozip Broz Tito, together with the Indian leader Nerhu and the Egyptian president, Nasser, became the founders of the Non-Aligned Movement, a movement which demanded that the 1945 Charter of United Nations be respected, and which stressed the need for peaceful coexistence of smaller and bigger nations on the basis of national self-determination and equality.<sup>5</sup>

In this changed context, the Italian and the Yugoslav communist leadership could find once more a common ground on the basis of the doctrine of "national ways to socialism". After the first sign of Soviet-Yugoslav reconciliation, contact between the Italian and the Yugoslav communist parties was re-established. In May 1956 PCI Secretary Palmiro Togliatti and communist MP and member of party leadership Luigi Longo visited Yugoslavia and met with Tito in Brioni. Togliatti and Longo apologized for past errors and praised the Yugoslav way to socialism, and expressed the wish for a similarly autonomous strategy in the Italian context (Urban 1986: 234; Terzuolo 1985: 181-190). In response to the process of de-Stalinization, Togliatti in fact designed a new strategy for the PCI at the international level. He contested the idea of the USSR as the "guiding state" and proposed a greater degree of autonomy for communist parties

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4 African-American writer Richard Wright wrote a wonderful report on the Bandung conference, showing the intersection between the Iron Curtain and what he names "The Colour Curtain": "The despised, the insulted, the hurt, the dispossessed—in short, the underdogs of the human race were meeting. Here were class and racial and religious consciousness on a global scale. Who had thought of organizing such a meeting? And what had these nations in common? Nothing, it seemed to me, but what their past relationship to the Western world had made them feel. This meeting of the rejected was in itself a kind of judgment upon the Western world!" (Wright 1956: 10).

5 As Chackrabarty (2010: 47) notes in a recent article on the Bandung conference, "It may be timely to remind ourselves of a recent moment in human history when the idea of nation was something people aspired to and the idea of empire wielded absolutely no moral force."

across the world. These notions were summarized in the formula of “polycentrism”.<sup>6</sup> The discussions with Tito and the Yugoslav formulation of Non-Alignment surely had some impact on Togliatti’s notion of “polycentrism”.

While arguing for a more democratic system of international relations, however, both Tito and Togliatti, for strategic reasons, were extremely ambivalent with regard to the democratization within the Yugoslav state and the Italian Communist Party.<sup>7</sup> The idea of national ways to socialism, moreover, came to a halt at the end of 1956, with the Soviet suppression of the Hungarian revolution (whose leader, Imre Nagy, had been inspired by the Yugoslav experience) and with the Anglo-French armed intervention that followed the Egyptian nationalization of the Suez channel. While condemning the Western intervention as imperialist, both Tito and Togliatti accepted the Soviet intervention in Hungary.<sup>8</sup>

All these historical events and transformations had an impact on the activities of Italian and Yugoslav women’s organizations in the years 1956-1957. At the same time, UDI and SDŽ leaders took an active role in these new geopolitical settings, notably when it came to their position within the WIDF. This chapter, therefore, describes how Cold War geopolitical changes shaped women’s organizations, and highlights the significant role played by Italian and Yugoslav women’s organizations – and particularly by its leaders – in Cold War politics in the years 1955-1957.

In the first part of the chapter, I reconstruct the changes in women’s organizations in Italy and Yugoslavia at the national and international level. I analyze the new formulations of organizational autonomy and women’s emancipation developed by the UDI, and their attempt to shift the focus of the WIDF from peace campaigns to women’s rights. I also address the position of the Union of Women’s Societies of Yugoslavia (SDŽ) within the WIDF, making use of a number of reports in which Yugoslav

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6 These ideas included “the suggestion that Communist parties were just one among several forces in the global march towards socialism, a notion inherent in the PCI’s later support for socialist pluralism. They also included the affirmation of autonomy as the basic organizational norm of the world Communist movement, a norm that could however lead to voluntary ententes among like-minded Communist parties” (Urban 1986: 225).

7 In 1953 and 1954 former revolutionary leader and vice-president Milovan Đilas started to argue for the need to establish a full democratization in Yugoslav society, putting an end to the political monopoly of the League of Communists. He was accused of revisionism, stripped of his functions and persecuted by the secret police (Đokić 2006). In Italy, while Khrushchev’s “secret speech” at the twentieth Congress was made public by the liberal press, the Italian Communist Party was reticent to spread the news, for fear of alienating the consensus of its militants, for whom Stalin had become a mythical figure. In his first interview about de-Stalinization in the magazine *Nuovi Argomenti* (May-June 1956), Togliatti openly acknowledged the degeneration of the bureaucratic system in the Soviet Union. He stressed, however, the successes of the “socialist construction” in the history of the USSR, and claimed that he had no doubt about the legality of the 1930s purges and trials. See Togliatti (1962: 85- 117), Ginsborg (2003: 204-5) and Rossanda (2005).

8 About the ambivalent position of the Yugoslav leaders during the Hungarian Revolution, see Granville (1998) and Stykalin (2005). About the reaction of the PCI leadership see Ginsborg (2003: 204-7) and Urban (1986).

female leaders position themselves as “critical observers” of the Federation. The connection between Yugoslav and Third World organizations is particularly significant in determining the Yugoslav stance towards the WIDF. In line with the Yugoslav foreign politics of Non-Alignment inaugurated in 1955, the SDŽ strengthened its links with women’s organizations in Asia, Africa and the Arab world, and was particularly attentive to the critiques of the WIDF that came from the Third World.

In the second part, I focus especially on the transnational exchanges between the UDI and the SDŽ. I look at the bilateral exchanges between the leaders of the Italian and Yugoslav organizations, paying special attention to the discussions held in the summer and autumn of 1957. The debates which took place during the Helsinki Plenum of the WIDF in summer 1957 and during the bilateral meeting between the UDI and the SDŽ representatives, held in Ljubljana in September 1957, serve as examples. I analyze the discussions between UDI and SDŽ leaders about the developments in the WIDF, as well as their exchange of views on how to better address “women’s questions” such as housing, labour rights, contraception and abortion.

In the third part of the chapter, after having stressed the transnational cooperation established between Italian and Yugoslav women’s organizations in 1956-1957, I come back to the specific situation of the Italo-Yugoslav border area, and to the effect of the Soviet-Yugoslav reconciliation on the communist party and on women’s organizations in the city of Trieste. In this chapter I will show that despite the official reconciliation between the Italian Communist Party and the Yugoslav League of Communists, the ideological and national divisions created by the Cominform Resolution of 1948 had a long-standing impact on Trieste left-wing organizations well beyond 1956.

## **1. The impact of 1956 on Italian and Yugoslav women’s organizations**

### **1.1. A new climate within the UDI: redefining emancipation and autonomy**

In this section and the next I look at the changes in women’s organizations in Italy and Yugoslavia in the years 1956-1957, and particularly at their changing international position within the framework of the Women’s International Democratic Federation. In this section I analyze the changes within the UDI at the national level, changes that influenced their transnational relationship with the SDŽ and with the WIDF. As already mentioned in the previous chapters, from the early Cold War period the position of the UDI and the AFŽ towards state power differs greatly.<sup>9</sup> At the same time, from the mid-1950s UDI and SDŽ leaders expressed a similar refusal of the instrumental role often played by the two organizations in Cold War geopolitics (see Chapter 5), and increasingly focused on women’s “real problems” at the national level.<sup>10</sup>

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9 While the UDI is part of oppositional left-wing forces, in alliance with the communist and socialist parties, the AFŽ gradually transforms into a “state feminist” organization, and is finally dissolved in 1953, when the Union of Women’s Societies (SDZ) replaces it, with the purpose of “mainstreaming” women’s issues within the structures of the socialist state.

10 The political and social issues that two organizations have to deal with are similar: women’s

After the 1953 elections, the political climate within Italy became less hostile to left-wing parties and mass organizations. When the urgency of broader political battles became less pressing, the leaders of the UDI were able to set out on a theoretical and political elaboration that had “women’s emancipation” as its main focus. The “new course” for the UDI started already in preparation for the 1953 Congress. In a preparatory document, communist leader Nilde Iotti directed a polemic against those critics who saw “women’s emancipation” as “a sort of feminism, suitable only to certain groups of women who have reached an independent position. We mean by emancipation the possibility for Italian women to redeem themselves from the conditions of debasement in which they live, from the worker and the day labourer, to the peasant, the intellectual, the housewife” (quoted in Michetti, Repetto and Viviani 1998: 342; emphasis added). In line with Togliatti’s strategy of “progressive democracy”, his partner, Nilde Iotti identified women’s emancipation as a legitimate progressive goal for the democratization of Italian society, thus challenging the idea that women’s emancipation could only be reached in the future socialist society (Michetti, Repetto and Viviani 1998: 89).

In 1955, the Second National Conference of Communist Women was organized. Ten years had elapsed since the first conference on the same theme, in itself proof of the secondary role of this issue within the party (Rodano 2010: 92). During the conference, many communist women did not mention the phrase “women’s emancipation” (*emancipazione femminile*) as a specific goal, but commended women’s class-based activism for broader social reforms. Against this trend, PCI reformist leader Giorgio Amendola argued that communist militants had to recognize “the autonomous place” of women’s struggle for emancipation “within the framework of the struggle for renewal and for socialism.” While assuming that there was a link between women’s emancipation and “general democratic struggles”, Amendola argued that it was necessary to recognize “the particular character of women’s struggle, its autonomous place and thus its specific organizational forms” (Rodano 2010: 94). As UDI leader Marisa Rodano reminded the conference, women’s emancipation was mainly seen in those years as subordinate to class struggle, and the idea of *emancipazione femminile* sounded to many comrades like a “bad word” (2010: 89-90; see also Michetti, Repetto and Viviani 1998: 68). Many communist militants still considered the UDI a mere electoral instrument. At the same time, some militants within the UDI and the PCI promoted a different line, arguing for a redefinition of women’s emancipation as an autonomous, socialist goal. In this, they were partially supported by reformist male leaders such as Amendola, and by Togliatti himself.<sup>11</sup>

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equal access to citizenship, education, labour, and welfare rights. Issues of planned parenthood, sexual education of the youth, contraception and abortion also start to be debated in both countries. See later in the chapter.

11 According to Rodano, during the 1955 conference Togliatti tried to mediate between different positions, arguing that in Italy the struggle for women’s emancipation was “essentially a struggle for rights, that is for the juridical equality with men, as well as for a [change in] custom, meaning the effective realisation of this equality; on the other hand it is a struggle against misery, for the elevation of the standards of living of the working masses in the city and in the

The fact that the communist party in its Eight Congress in 1957 would start to use the term *questione femminile* (women's question) – a term that was highly criticized by second wave feminists – was at the time celebrated as a great achievement. The term *questione femminile*, in fact, was established in analogy to Gramsci's concept of *questione meridionale* (Southern question). The usage of this term was a way to acknowledge that the issue of women's emancipation was "a national problem, transversal to social classes", having its own independent dynamic not subordinated to class politics (Rodano 2010: 106). As discussed in the previous chapter, the significance of the word *autonomy* within the UDI was radically different from second wave feminist definitions. The formulation of concepts such as *autonomy* and *emancipation* was connected to the ongoing internal debate within the Italian Communist Party about the definition of the "women's question". The debate was on whether it was a "national" question with its own historical specificities or an issue subordinated to class struggle and economic development. The definition of *autonomy* was inseparable from the idea of the *unity* of the organization, which allowed for the presence of both communist and socialist women within the UDI. The autonomy proposed at the time, therefore, was organizational, rather than political.<sup>12</sup>

In 1956 Marisa Rodano had been nominated as the new UDI President, replacing Maria Maddalena Rossi before the fifth Congress of the UDI, held in April 1956. This change symbolized the new line of the UDI, since Maria Maddalena Rossi was closer to PCI hard-liners, while Marisa Rodano followed a more reformist strategy. A thorough self-critique of the UDI stance is apparent in the first preparatory document for the Directive Committee drafted by the newly elected President in June 1956 (see document 39 in Michetti, Repetto and Viviani 1998: 395-400). In this document, one of the main weaknesses of the UDI was found in the fact that many of its leaders were not convinced that the struggle for women's emancipation was the ultimate *goal*, but instead saw this goal as an *instrument* to propagate left-wing political stances (1998:

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countryside." Thus, he argued that the struggle for women's emancipation was "an essential part of the general struggle for the democratic renewal of society" (Rodano 2010: 95).

12 During a session of the PCI Central Committee held in on 12-14 February 1962 and dedicated to the women's movement within the party ("Sviluppare l'elaborazione politica e l'iniziativa delle donne comuniste"), Nilde Iotti proposed "a women's autonomous movement within the party", and added: "*When we speak of autonomy we speak of operative and organizational autonomy, in the sense of autonomy of initiative, and not of political autonomy. The line of the Party is valid for everyone; within this line the feminine movement develops its autonomous initiatives, and has thus more liberty.*" The model of organizational autonomy, taken from the Christian-Democratic party, is motivated with the need to adapt to women's needs, which are dictated by their "limited freedom" due to family life. As we can see, the meaning of the word *autonomy* as used within the UDI and among communist women in the 1950s and 1960s radically differs from the formulations used in the 1970s by new social movements.

396).<sup>13</sup> The hierarchical, pedagogic stance of the organization, and the instrumental attitude of many leaders towards the “feminine masses” were also criticized.<sup>14</sup>

The 1956 document also argued for the need for the UDI to become more autonomous from the communist and socialist party. In this, it voiced the growing dissatisfaction of UDI leaders, who in the early Cold War years had been constantly mobilized for political campaigns of assistance and propaganda decided by policy-makers outside of the organization.<sup>15</sup> The document argued that regarding women’s rights it was necessary to shift “from propaganda to struggle”, and that the only way to do this was to establish the UDI’s “autonomy from the subordination to any political force”, supporting women’s interests as an ultimate goal and not as an instrumental means to a different end. This new autonomous line meant that the UDI would not “*take side, in principle, for or against any political force nor administrative formation nor government, provided that they do not reject the ideals of the Resistance and of antifascism. The UDI is not programmatically on the opposition*”, but has to determine its stance of support or critique in each case, on the basis of concrete facts, demand by demand.”<sup>16</sup> This declaration of autonomy from the socialist and communist parties represented, in Rodano’s view, “a cultural revolution”. This decision, however, remained contested within the left. For the first time, before the general 1958 elections, the organization did not give any clear instruction on how to vote, and was harshly criticized for this within the PCI and the PSI.

At the same time, this independent position allowed UDI leaders to maintain the unity of communist, socialist and independent militants within the organization (Rodano 2010: 110-111; Michetti, Repetto and Viviani 1998: 89-94). In 1956, in fact, the traditional alliance between the Communist (PCI) and the Socialist Party (PSI) was coming to an end, but communist and socialist women were still working together in the UDI.

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13 The document criticized the fact that the organization had focused only on class-based demands, leaving aside other important issues such as prostitution, contraception, or the reform of the family code.

14 The document argued that UDI leaders did not sufficiently act as “women’s representatives”, and that “often many UDI leaders behave towards women as if they only are in possess of the truth (depositarie di sicure verità), while women themselves are seen as a mass of people who has to be “approached”, “touched”, “mobilised” and so on” (Michetti, Repetto and Viviani 1998, 397). Local militants, moreover, were not to be anymore “executors” of a political line decided from above, but instead had to become real women’s leaders (1998: 400). Despite its importance, however, this document was circulating among national and provincial leaders. As Rodano herself admits, the pedagogic, modernist approach of the organization towards the “feminine masses”, was only partially challenged in practice (Rodano 2010: 110-111).

15 For some ironic remarks about the never-ending task of collecting signatures for international peace campaigns, see Rodano (2008b: 142); about the dissatisfaction of UDI leaders based in Rome, see Rodano (2010: 87).

16 Emphasis added. L’Udi “non si schiera, in linea di principio, a favore o contro alcuna forza politica né a favore o contro alcuna formazione amministrativa o di governo purchè esse non rinneghino gli ideali della resistenza e dell’antifascismo. L’Udi non è programmaticamente all’opposizione, ma deve determinare la sua posizione di appoggio o di polemica caso per caso, per fatti concreti, richiesta per richiesta” (1998: 398).



The new stance of the UDI became even more significant after the Twentieth Congress of the PCUS and the Soviet intervention in Hungary, when the socialist party (PSI) decided to distance itself from the communist party (PCI) and from its support for Moscow, and started to seek an alliance with the Christian-Democrats. The presence of socialist women within the UDI, then, was possible only if UDI leaders managed to reach a compromise and to assume a critical position towards Moscow. The geopolitical changes of 1956, moreover, accelerated the internal political changes within the organisation (Michetti, Repetto and Viviani 1998: 94), leading to a new position within the Women's International Democratic Federation (see later in this chapter).

The UDI's "new course", therefore, was the result of multiple political factors and strategic decisions. On the one hand, it reflected the new equilibrium reached within the PCI after the beginning of de-Stalinization and the changes of 1956, characterized by Togliatti's "national way to socialism", and by the marginalization of pro-Moscow hardliners. It was also a result of the shifting relations between the PCI and the PSI. The new line of autonomy and unity allowed communist, socialist and independent women to work together on women's rights irrespective of their party affiliation. At the same time, UDI leaders had their own agency in determining the changes within the organization. Tired of being mobilized on behalf of their respective parties, they strived to carve out their own political space, defining women's emancipation as the ultimate, legitimate goal of women's organizations, not only nationally, but also internationally. Later in this chapter I describe how the UDI strived to transform the goals of the WIDF, in the process getting closer to the position of the Yugoslav woman's organization, the SDŽ.

## 1.2. Critical observers: Yugoslav SDŽ leaders and the WIDF

In the previous chapter I analyzed how the Antifascist Women's Front of Yugoslavia (AFŽ) was dissolved in 1953, and replaced with the Union of Women's Societies (SDŽ), in line with the new doctrine of self-management and of the "withering away of the state" (Johnson 1972: 143-156). The SDŽ was intended to federate different "women's societies" dealing with specific societal problems, fostering women's direct participation within the broader framework of the Socialist Alliance of the Working People, the organization that represented mass participation in socialist Yugoslavia. After the death of Stalin and with the consolidation of the Yugoslav geopolitical position in the mid-1950s, the Yugoslav coercive state machinery created in the postwar period was gradually reformed. This led to an increase in individual liberties and to a limitation of the arbitrary power of the secret police. The Yugoslav Communist Party changed its name into the League of Communists (*Savez Komunista Jugoslavije*, SKJ) in 1952, and stressed the "educational role" of the SKJ among the masses, in contrast to the Stalinist control of the previous years. Workers' councils were established and some of the privileges of the communist elite were reduced. Đilas' 1954 proposals to abandon the Leninist conception of the party, and the one-party system, however, were fiercely rejected (Johnson 1972: 144; 216-217; see previous sections).

Since the ideological-political role of the League of Communists after 1953 was ambivalent and not clearly defined (Johnson 1972: 217), the same happened for the Union of Women's Societies (SDŽ). The main idea behind the dissolution of the AFŽ, namely that women had to be encouraged to take part in the socialist institutions in order to strengthen their rights, proved more difficult to implement than expected. In many SDŽ reports from 1954-1955, there is a constant complaint of the feminine masses having become 'passive' after the dissolution of the AFŽ, and of a general 'regression' on the women's question.<sup>17</sup>

While in the most advanced republics and in the cities some women tended to join specific "societies" for the resolution of concrete issues (childcare and maternity, school canteens, welfare provisions), in the less developed republics and in the villages the situation remained very difficult. The situation was also challenging for female workers in the factories, where overexploitation was rampant and childcare nonexistent. The documents written by SDŽ leaders from the mid-1950s onwards remarked on the constant lack of interest in women's problems within the trade unions and within the Socialist Alliance. Against the idea of separate women's organizations, SDŽ leaders tried to promote women's participation within overall political institutions, and to "mainstream" women's concerns within the broader social institutions of the Socialist Alliance, notably at the local level.<sup>18</sup>

At the international level, since 1949 the leaders of SDŽ had attempted to overcome the isolation caused by its expulsion from the WIDF. In the early 1950s, SDŽ leaders were mainly in contact with Scandinavian women's organizations on specific issues such as domestic education and childcare, and had established links with the women's sections of socialist parties in Western Europe. Moreover, in line with the Yugoslav politics of Non-Alignment, SDŽ leaders were starting to establish contact with the female representatives of decolonization movements, particularly in Asia.<sup>19</sup> With the beginning of de-Stalinization, and the reconciliation between Yugoslavia

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17 See for instance the report ("zapisnik") from 6.3.1954, included in the 354 fond (SDŽJ), box 1 (Zapisnici i stenografske sa sastanaka upravnog odbora i sekretariata SDŽJ i sa savetovanja SDŽJ 1954-1961), Belgrade, Arhiv Jugoslavije.

18 See also the report ("zapisnik") from 6.10.1954, Upravnog Odbora SDŽJ, included in the 354 fond (SDŽJ), box 1 (Zapisnici i stenografske sa sastanaka upravnog odbora i sekretariata SDŽJ i sa savetovanja SDŽJ 1954-1961), Belgrade, Arhiv Jugoslavije; Similarly to Togliatti, Yugoslav leaders such as Tito and Kardelj define women's emancipation as subordinate to the achievement of socialism, and see "backwardness" and "economic underdevelopment" as the main obstacles to women's full equality. See the quotation from the 1957 SSRNJ Brioni Plenum included in "Postavka IV Kongress SDŽ", 1959, 354 fond (SDŽJ), box 7-8 ("O Aktivnosti Žena u Drustvu I Porodici"), Belgrade, Arhiv Jugoslavije.

19 See for instance the report of 2.09.1955 on international relations, Uglavni Odbor SDŽ, fond 354: 1: Zapisnici i stenografske sa sastanaka upravnog odbora i sekretariata SDŽJ i sa savetovanja SDŽJ 1954-1961, Belgrade, Arhiv Jugoslavije. In this report SDŽ leaders refer to their contacts with the feminine sections of socialist parties in Belgium, Greece and West Germany; they also refer to some contacts in Sweden and Denmark, and to some connections with India, Indonesia and Burma, and advance the possibility of using their contacts in Asia to discuss the issue of decolonization within the Socialist International.

and the Soviet Union in 1955, the Yugoslav female leaders were able to re-establish connections with the WIDF, and with its affiliated organizations in Eastern and Western Europe.

The first contact between Yugoslav and Italian militants is re-established through a greeting card sent by the UDI to the SDŽ for the New Year of 1956, followed soon afterwards by an invitation to attend the next Congress of the UDI. In April 1956 two Yugoslav delegates (Marija Koš and Vlatka Babić) attended the Fifth Congress of the Union of Italian Women.<sup>20</sup> In the same month, SDŽ Yugoslav delegates were invited to attend the WIDF Congress in Beijing. In Beijing the Yugoslav representatives were invited to join the WIDF once more:

In a warm and enthusiastic atmosphere, Mme. Eugenie Cotton's proposal, to annul the decision taken in 1949 to expel the Yugoslav members from the Council, which they recognised as unjust, was unanimously approved. Several delegates intervened in commission meetings as well as in the plenary session, expressing their deep desire that the bonds of friendship be strengthened and fruitful co-operation again built up between the Yugoslav Women and the Federation.

The Italian delegation present in Beijing supported this proposal, noting that the UDI already had "friendly relations" with the Yugoslav women and aimed at further collaboration in the future. The Yugoslav representatives, however, declined the offer to re-enter the WIDF. Nonetheless, they agreed to participate in further congresses as observers, and to cooperate on specific issues of common interest. In line with Tito's politics of Non-Alignment, Yugoslav women were keen to support the position of autonomous "national ways to socialism" within international organizations such as the WIDF. In their response to the WIDF, they stated in fact:

The Federation of Yugoslav Women's Organisations considers that the problem of women's equality is still directly tied up with the struggle for social progress and that it can be solved in different ways according to the specific conditions of each country. For this reason progressive women's organizations in every country should seek the best ways and means of settling those questions and deciding on methods of action and international co-operation (...) On the basis of such principles the Federation of

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20 A detailed report by Marija Koš about the fifth UDI Congress is contained in ARS, Ljubljana, KDAŽS – ZZDS, 1, 1956-1957, box n.7, folder 146. The Yugoslavs noted that during the congress there was a certain distance between the UDI leadership and the foreign guests, except from the Soviet representatives and Madame Eugénie Cotton. Most of the Italian delegates were sympathetic to the Yugoslav guests but did not dare to go into political discussions, a part from Dina Rinaldi, who says that "a big mistake" has been committed towards Yugoslavia. The Yugoslavs also observed that there was a certain "distance" between the UDI leadership and the intermediate delegates. Many of the leaders, in fact, left at the end of the Congress with their cars and did not mingle with the delegates from the base. The Yugoslav guests, thus, noted that in the leadership "there are quite some arm-chair communists" ("Čini se da u rukovodstvo ima dosta 'salonskih komunistkinja'. Daleko bolji utisak ostavile su delegatkinje nego rukovodstvo UDI-a").

Yugoslav Women's Organisations co-operates with many national and international organizations dealing with problems of children, women and family.<sup>21</sup>

In 1956 Yugoslav leaders refused to rejoin the WIDF, since they regarded it as aligned with the Soviet bloc (*blokovska organizacija*). Nonetheless, they established regular bilateral relations with the women's organizations that were part of the WIDF, and notably with the UDI, in an attempt to foster more democratic methods within the Federation. They also established direct links with the women's organizations of Asia and Africa, which were gaining in importance within the WIDF and which were increasingly criticizing the Federation for its moderation on decolonization struggles. The Yugoslav female leaders, therefore, through women's internationalism, played a very active role in the politics of national ways to socialism and Non-Alignment, carving a space out for debate between the Western and the Soviet bloc, in dialogue with Third World decolonization movements.

In the next sections, I will analyze how SDŽ and UDI leaders established bilateral and multilateral transnational relations, looking in particular at their critical discussion about the role and methods of the WIDF. The next sections are based mainly on reports by Yugoslav leaders, which are particularly helpful in detailing the different point of view within the WIDF. Deeply aware of the ambivalences of Soviet hegemony, the Yugoslav militants in fact took part in WIDF Plenums and Congresses as critical observers, and determinedly pursued a coherent strategy in their bilateral and multilateral relations. The discussions presented in the next sections are a further contribution to the forgotten history of the WIDF. As already shown in Chapter 5, different positions existed within the WIDF, although they were rarely expressed in the final proceedings of its different congresses. Contrary to the prevailing Cold War historiography, which describes the organization as a mere instrument in the hand of the Soviets, the following section demonstrates that power relations and decision-making within the WIDF were matters of international discussion and contention.

## **2. Women's internationalism and its discontents**

### **2.1. The WIDF and the geopolitical crises of 1956 in Suez and Hungary**

In the summer and autumn of 1956, while reinstating the ideal of "national ways to socialism" within the WIDF, the Yugoslav militants were re-establishing their connections with women's organizations from the Eastern bloc (Soviet, Romanian, Polish and Czechoslovak) through a number of bilateral visits. In November 1956, Vida Tomšić was in Moscow for a visit to the Council of the Soviet women. At the time, the Hungarian revolution was violently suppressed through Soviet intervention. Once home, Tomšić reported that the effects of the Cominform Resolution could still be felt in her encounter with Soviet women. The discussions with the Soviet representatives,

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21 Translated into English in the WIDF journal *Women of the whole world*, n. 12, Dec 1956, from "Nouvelles Yougoslaves", Paris, 5 November 1956.

Nina Popova and Lidia Petrova, remained quite vague, without any political debate. The Yugoslav visitors also noted that while the foreign delegations were shown the marvels of the Soviet Union, the propaganda about the justness of the Soviet intervention in Hungary was omnipresent, “to the point of disinformation.”<sup>22</sup>

The 1956 geopolitical crises of Suez and Hungary in fact had caused unremitting tensions and heated debates within the women’s organisations affiliated to the WIDF. According to Marisa Rodano (2010: 112-113), the mediation of Italian functionaries working within the WIDF, Angiola Minella<sup>23</sup> and Carmen Zanti<sup>24</sup>, had been crucial in reaching a compromise among the different national branches, and in tempering pro-Soviet positions. The WIDF statement, in fact, was quite moderate in comparison to Soviet official propaganda on the Hungarian events. The December 1956 WIDF statement “on peace” started by saying that “Serious events have taken place during recent weeks causing much suffering and loss of life, and which have seriously worsened the international situation. Throughout the world women are expressing their grave concern and are voicing their protests.” It continued: “Aggression against Egypt, creating a dangerous centre of war in the Mediterranean, [and] the tragic events in Hungary which threaten to make another area of war in the heart of Europe, are attempts to revive the atmosphere of the cold war and to thrust mankind once again into a world conflict.”<sup>25</sup>

While it did not explicitly condemn the Soviet intervention in Hungary, using a vague formulation – “tragic events” as opposed to the “aggression against Egypt” – the statement did not condone it either. It expressed instead worry at the revival of the “cold war” atmosphere. It continued further by recalling the spirit of the Bandung meeting and the summit of the Big Four in Geneva, both held in 1955: “Women have struggled with great determination and confidence for the principles of negotiation and peaceful co-existence to triumph over policies of force. With great hope they welcomed the Bandung decisions and the ‘Geneva spirit’ – the successes of the peoples’

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22 The report of the Yugoslav visit to the USSR can be found in Zagreb, Hrvastki Državni Arhiv, AFŽ-KDAŽ – HR HDA 1234-5-box 71 (Međunarodne veze 1945-1959).

23 Angiola Minella Molinari (1920-1988) was born in a bourgeois family in Turin. In 1932 her father, director of an insurance company, was killed in a Fascist attack. Angiola graduated in philosophy and literature, and during the war was involved in the Resistance first as nurse and then as fighting partisan. In 1945 she joined the PCI, and was part of the Constituent Assembly. She was elected in the Savona municipal council in 1946 and in the Italian parliament in 1948. She worked from 1953 to 1958 at the secretariat of the WIDF in East Berlin. In the 1960s and 1970s she pursued her political activities as MP and senator in Italy.

24 Carmen Zanti (1923-1979) spent most of her youth in France, where her father Angelo had gone into exile for his antifascist activities. She joined the French communist party in Nice, and in 1940 she returned to Italy. From 1943 she was engaged in the antifascist Resistance. Since the early 1950s she was part of the UDI leadership, and from 1953 to 1957 she was secretary of the WIDF in East Berlin. After the UDI break with the WIDF in 1963 Zanti returned to Italian politics as MP and as senator, and was particularly involved in welfare plans for childhood in the province of Reggio-Emilia. For a biography of Zanti, see Nava and Ruggerini (1987).

25 *Women of the whole world* n. 12, December 1956. Statement of the WIDF on peace (Berlin, 30th of November 1956), p.5.

struggle for peace.” The statement thus condemned “(...) the policy of military blocs which have resulted in the presence of foreign troops and the setting up of military bases in many countries” and supported the proposal made by the Swiss government for a meeting of the heads of state of the United States, the USSR, Great Britain, France and India with the aim of relaxing geopolitical tensions.<sup>26</sup>

This 1956 statement represented a compromise between the different political positions within the WIDF, in the attempt to ease the tensions that rose in the Federation, notably when the Federation was used as an instrument of pro-Soviet politics. The accent on women’s unity and autonomy, against war and for “peaceful coexistence” – seems indeed to recall the Yugoslav principles of national sovereignty and Non-Alignment, while anticipating the position of UDI representatives within the WIDF in the late 1950s and early 1960s. In the next section I will look in detail at the discussions between the Italian and Yugoslav women’s organizations about the role of the WIDF. While the Yugoslav SDŽ representatives remained critical observers of the WIDF, the Union of Italian Women tried to introduce its new line on the primacy of women’s emancipation into the Federation.

## 2.2. Contesting Soviet hegemony: the WIDF Helsinki Plenum

After the Congress of Beijing in April 1956, the first WIDF event that was attended by both Italian and Yugoslav women’s organizations was the Plenum held in Helsinki in June 1957. The Yugoslav representatives at the Helsinki Plenum, moreover, were still feeling the effects of the isolation they had experienced because of the Cominform Resolution (see Chapter 5). In her report, Yugoslav SDŽ militant, Saša Đuranović-Janda observed that both Eugénie Cotton and Nina Popova expressed their relief with respect to the Soviet-Yugoslav reconciliation, saying that the Cominform period “has been terrible.” The Italian and French communists, however, maintained a distant attitude towards the Yugoslavs, which they did not seem to consider as “part of their rank.” Only Carmen Zanti, the newly elected WIDF Secretary, seemed to be interested in the activities of the Yugoslav women and asked for some material.<sup>27</sup> Besides reporting on the Yugoslav position, Đuranović-Janda describes other tensions that were present within the WIDF in 1957. She noted that Soviet hegemony was contested, and that Asian and African delegations played an increasingly prominent role in the meeting. The discourses voiced within Federation were, in fact, heterogeneous, and changed according to shifting geopolitical balances.

During the plenary discussions, but especially “in the corridors”, one could feel,

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<sup>26</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>27</sup> “Izvestaj o toku Sastanka Saveta MDFŽ, Helsinki 22-27 Juni 1957” by Saša Đuranović Janda, fond 354 (SDŽT), k. 9, Arhiv Jugoslavije, Belgrade, pp.1-6. An extended discussion of all the decisions and issues mentioned at the Helsinki Plenum and in this report is beyond the scope of this section. I will focus here on the main questions that were considered relevant by the Yugoslav observers, namely those who had to do with Soviet hegemony and decolonization movements.

according to the Yugoslav observer, that there were different opinions about the decision-making methods of the WIDF. Some delegations opposed the “old methods” of administration, that is, the automatic election of the WIDF leadership without broader discussion, and the leadership’s veto power over the documents it ratified. The discussions in the working commissions on the various documents, moreover, was “extraordinarily lively”, with heated discussions and moments of tension, in what Đuranović-Janda calls “the battle for the new spirit” against the old spirit. The discussions about the different passages of the Statute lasted for hours, and some WIDF leaders tried to enforce their position (here the Yugoslav observer explicitly mentions Maria Maddalena Rossi as “the Italian who follows the Soviet line”).<sup>28</sup> The Arab countries were particularly insistent on the formulations dealing with the struggle against colonialism. The Arab women in fact bemoaned the reticence of the WIDF to take a position on the Algerian war and in the Middle East, since this went against the positions of the French delegation, while it had in the past strongly protested against in the wars of Korea and Vietnam.<sup>29</sup>

A transnational controversy, furthermore, stemmed from the screening of a documentary commissioned by the Federation. *La Rose du Vent*, by Joris Ivens and other directors (1957), was intended to offer typical scenes of women’s lives in five different countries (Brazil, the Soviet Union, France, Italy, and China). Yet the propagandistic intent of the film was immediately apparent: while in the Soviet Union and in China the future of society, including that of young women, appeared promising and favorable, in Italy, France and Brasil the female protagonists were oppressed by poverty, labor exploitation, evictions from their homes and police harassment.<sup>30</sup> The Brazilian

28 Izvestaj o toku Sastanka Saveta MDFŽ, p. 2. “Međutim, rad u komisijama bio je neobično živ. Dolazilo je do napetih situacija, podizanja tona, očiglednih neslaganja, borbe za novi duh odnosno zadržavanje starog.”

29 Izvestaj o toku Sastanka Saveta MDFŽ, p. 3: “Arabljanke su upozoravale da se MDFŽ jako angažovala u vezi sa Korejom i Vijetnamom, a da se sad ne istupa precizno i masovno u vezi sa Alžirom i situacijom na bliskom istoku.”

30 For a detailed description of the different episodes composing the film (in German), see <http://www.defa.de/cms/DesktopDefault.aspx?TabID=412&FilmID=Q6UJ9A00409F&qpn=0>. I watched the film, in order to understand the critiques formulated in the Yugoslav reports. The film provides a very interesting example of the values and imaginaries constructed by the Women’s International Democratic Federation. The rhetoric effects of the film are achieved through the juxtaposition of settings and plots. In the episodes taking place in the Soviet Union and in China, the landscape is beautiful, the characters do not seem to have any material problem, and the local communities are exerting their decisional powers. The only struggle of the female characters is to fight for their rights in the public sphere, something that men are reluctant to accept. In both episodes, the emancipated female heroine finally gives a public speech in front of the community. The episodes end with crowd scenes, showing happy Soviet workers and happy Chinese peasants in charge of their destiny. In the Brazilian episode, instead, the landscape is desolate and dusty, and a woman gives birth in the fields, while the peasant protagonists are trying to reach the city of San Paolo to find work. In the French episode, set in a gloomy periphery of Paris, a left-wing schoolteacher defends her poor pupils and their family from evictions, and is harassed by public authorities. The Italian episode, directed by Gillo

episode especially was criticized by the Brazilian delegation. They argued that the film could not be used in their country since it was not realistic: "maybe something like this happens in the deep Amazonian forests."<sup>31</sup> Đuranović-Janda reported that many delegations criticized the film for not portraying about women's lives in the different countries realistically, particularly in the Soviet Union: "in the corridors, and publicly, people say that the film is bad and for some countries completely useless – it is not typical – but stereotypical, exaggerated, artificial – nothing works anywhere, but in the USSR everything is wonderful, there are no problems, except misunderstandings in love."<sup>32</sup> The pro-Soviet bias of the meeting was also evident in the organization of the delegates' free time in Helsinki. Some international delegates complained that no cultural visit of the city was organized, since allegedly "in capitalism there is nothing to be seen."<sup>33</sup>

The name, statute and priorities of the Federation were also discussed during the Plenum.<sup>34</sup> Many delegations – and notably the Italian one – expressed their reserve about the constant mobilization for peace and disarmament, and asked instead to work on longstanding discrimination against women in daily life and particularly in the labor market. The statement of UDI President Rosetta Longo – translated and quoted with great interest by the Yugoslavs – started by recalling the new line established by the Fifth UDI Congress: "The struggle for women's emancipation is the *raison d'être* of our organization." What is needed, Longo argued, was an "effectively autonomous and unitary" organization.<sup>35</sup> Autonomy meant the possibility to realize various initiatives to defend women's interests, independently from other organizations or political forces. Unitary meant that the organization could affiliate groups

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Pontecorvo, was also set in a working class periphery, where female workers occupy a textile factory to protest against a wave of lay-offs. Interestingly, the Italian delegation imported the film "illegally" in their suitcases, after a meeting in Switzerland with WIDF secretary Carmen Zanti, before obtaining the necessary authorizations from the Italian state. The Italian episode was screened once again in 2002 during a demonstration for labor rights (Rodano 2010: 117; Rodano 2008b: 200-201).

31 Izvestaj o toku Sastanka Saveta MDFŽ, p. 4.

32 "Ovo međutim nije tačno – bio je prikazan u Helsinku – kuloarski a i javno smatra da se lošim i sa neke zemlje sasvim neupotrebljiv – nije tipisno – sabloniziran, crno-belo, inkostruisan – nigde ništa ne valja, a u SSSR sve je prekrasno – nema problema – sem nesporazum u ljubavi." Saša Đuranović-Janda, "Izvestaj br.2 o publikacijama i drugim sredstvima informacija MDFŽ." Fond 354 (SDŽJ), k. 9, Arhiv Jugoslavije, Belgrade.

33 Izvestaj o toku Sastanka Saveta MDFŽ, p. 5.

34 One proposal was to eliminate the adjective "democratic" (which was too connotated in a communist sense), and to change the adjective "international" into "world" (Women's world federation). Some delegations, however, argued that a name change was not sufficient to change the connotation of the organization and its functioning. See next section.

35 I am quoting here from another report by Saša Đuranović-Janda, with extensive translations of Rosetta Longo's speech. See fond 354 (SDŽJ), k. 9, Međunarodne Veze SDŽ, Italije, Arhiv Jugoslavije, Belgrade. The whole Serbo-Croatian translation of the statement by Rosetta Longo at the Helsinki Council can be found in the Slovene National Study Library (NSK) in Trieste, 1st box AFŽ-ZDZ-DAT, folder "Jugoslovanske Zenske Organizacije."



and individuals who had the same goal on women's emancipation, without having the same political background or opinion, in order to represent the largest number of women in the country.<sup>36</sup>

As for the role and tasks of the WIDF, Rosetta Longo recalled the UDI statement on the events in Suez and Hungary, which expressed solidarity with the victims of all wars and stressed the need for peaceful negotiation. She argued that the situation in the world was changing, with the decolonization of the Third World, new processes of industrialization in the West, and the processes of democratization and decentralization in the socialist countries. After the crisis of 1956, the world was going, according to Longo, towards a phase of "peaceful coexistence". The WIDF, therefore, had to change in accordance with the new political situation, developing its own independent stance and its own specific "physiognomy".

While arguing that the struggle for peace had to continue in the interest of women, Rosetta Longo noted that there were specific commissions, such as the International Committee of Mothers, working on peace and atomic disarmament. The specific character of the organization, according to Longo, could be reached only if the WIDF had women's emancipation as its main goal:

The basic content of such an independent political line must contain, in our opinion, the goal to raise the living conditions of women in the political, economic and social field. In each country the problem of women's emancipation exists. Of course problems are not the same everywhere. In some countries the problem is to gain the right to political participation, in others the advancement of women at work and in the family, while other countries are still developing an awareness about the need for women to unite, in order to eliminate certain customs and backwardness, get an education, create social institutions, etc. In each country, the question of women's progress and of their full equality, not only on paper but in reality, remains.<sup>37</sup>

In keeping with the idea of "national ways to socialism", Longo was in favour of strengthening the executive role of the different national branches within the WIDF.

As related by Marisa Rodano, a meeting was held in Rome on the 9<sup>th</sup> of July, soon after the Helsinki Plenum; WIDF secretary general Carmen Zanti, WIDF officer Angiola Minella, the delegate of the women's commission of PCI Nella Marcellino, and the communist members of the UDI secretariat, that is Marisa Rodano, Nilde

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36 Rosetta Longo, "Intervencija", 1st box AFŽ-ZDZ-DAT, folder "Jugoslovanske Zenske Organizacije", NSK Trieste.

37 I am translating here the Serbo-Croatian translation of the speech. "Osnovni sadržaj jedne takve političke i nezavisne linije mora da sadrži, po našem mišljenju, podizanje uslova života žena na političkom, ekonomskom i socijalnom polju. U svakoj zemlji postoji problem emancipacije žena. Naravno on se ne postavlja svugde na isti način. U nekim zemljama problem se postavlja da se dobije pravo glasa u učešće u političkom životu, u drugima za poboljšanje položaj žene na radu i u porodici, u drugima još se razvija među ženama svest o potrebi ujedinjenja, da odstrane izvesnu zaostalost u običajima i odgoju, da stvore socijalne ustanove, itd. U svakoj zemlji se postavlja pitanje progresa žena i njihove pune jednakosti ne samo na papiru nego u stvarnosti." Rosetta Longo, "Intervencija", p. 5.

Iotti and Vittorina dal Monte, were present to discuss the position of the UDI towards the WIDF. During the meeting Carmen Zanti expressed a “severe judgment” on the Helsinki Plenum, and on the fact that the Soviet delegation saw the WIDF as an instrument of their foreign politics. The UDI proposal at the Plenum to reverse the priorities of the WIDF, putting women’s emancipation before the struggle for peace, was not understood, and “the UDI in Helsinki seemed very isolated” (Rodano 2010: 112). In order to change this situation, the UDI leaders decided to hold a number of bilateral meetings with other organizations affiliated to the WIDF, or not (such as the Yugoslav SDŽ), in order to develop some alliances to change the role and the functioning of the Federation (see Rodano 2010: 113).

The reports about the Helsinki Plenum make evident that Italian and Yugoslav women’s organizations played an important role in the redefinition of Cold War international politics, and in the redefinition of the goals and perspectives of the WIDF. These reports also demonstrate that a number of political ideas – such as the concept of “national ways to socialism”, and a critique of Soviet hegemony – circulated across blocs, through WIDF international meetings and through women’s organizations such as the UDI and the SDŽ. From the mid-1950s, non-aligned Yugoslavia offered a geopolitical location in which different political ideas and currents, and particularly the position of the decolonization movements of Asia and Africa, could be expressed. In the next section I will discuss the bilateral meeting between Italian and Yugoslav women leaders held in Ljubljana in the autumn of 1957, the first significant meeting after the Cominform era.

### 2.3. The 1957 Ljubljana meeting between Italian and Yugoslav leaders

At the Helsinki Plenum, the UDI had assumed a critical position towards the pro-Soviet stance of the WIDF, drawing closer to the position of the Yugoslav leaders. The Yugoslav observers at the Helsinki Plenum were very interested in Rosetta Longo’s intervention and in the Italian position towards the WIDF. In July 1957, soon after the Helsinki meeting, SDŽ president Bosa Cvetic sent a letter to the UDI headquarters to invite a delegation of three or four members to visit Yugoslavia.<sup>38</sup> UDI President Marisa Rodano replied positively on the 24<sup>th</sup> of July, stating: “we already thought that an exchange of viewpoints about our respective experiences would be very useful for our future work.”<sup>39</sup>

In another letter, sent on the same day by UDI secretary general Rosetta Longo<sup>40</sup>, the 13<sup>th</sup> to the 15<sup>th</sup> of September were proposed for the bilateral Italo-Yugoslav meeting, together with a list of possible participants. They were UDI president Marisa Rodano, secretary general Rosetta Longo, national secretary Giuliana Nenni, WIDF

38 Letter, 11.7.1957, Belgrade, Arhiv Jugoslavije, Fond 354 (SDŽJ), box 9 – 186.

39 Letter, 24.7.1957, Belgrade, Arhiv Jugoslavije, Fond 354 (SDŽJ), box 9. Rodano added that this meeting would be part of a new framework of international activities. She also mentioned that UDI members “of different opinions” would take part in the meeting.

40 Letter, 24.7.1957, Rome, Archivio Centrale UDI, fondo DnM 57.3-22, fascicolo 9.

secretary Carmen Zanti and WIDF vice-secretary Maria Maddalena Rossi. The high functions occupied by those who were part of the delegation makes evident that this encounter was supposed to seal a new epoch of bilateral relations, after the dark Cominform years. The SDŽ secretary Marija Kos replied that she was impressed with the “quality of the composition of the delegation”, and agreed to host the Italian delegation on the chosen dates. Since the Italian militants expressed the wish to meet “not far from the border”, the SDŽ secretary suggested that they meet in Ljubljana, with a short visit to Zagreb, then hosting an exhibition on “Family and Domestic science” (*Porodica i Domacinstvo*).<sup>41</sup>

Although interested in the attitude of Italian UDI representatives, the Yugoslav leaders were also critical of the possible outcomes of an argument about the autonomy of women’s organizations. In August Vida Tomšić sent a letter to some other SDŽ members, inclosing the translation of Rosetta Longo’s intervention at the Helsinki meeting.<sup>42</sup> While Tomšić found “many new things” in the intervention by Rosetta Longo, she also saw some dangers of “disorientation”. Tomšić commented that the “strong emphasis on the struggle for the autonomy of the women’s movement is – for us Marxists – an abstraction. The women’s movement has to be a fundamental part of the struggle for a true democracy and the liberation of human beings, of the struggle for socialism.” The “Italian communists”, Tomšić argued, “know that, too”. But in their attempt to criticize Soviet hegemony, they insist excessively on the formulation of the struggle for women’s rights, reaching “the other extreme”, that is, *feminism*.<sup>43</sup>

Since she conceived of the women’s question as a social question (see Chapter 6), Vida Tomšić claimed that there was no need to revert to these formulations to criticize Soviet hegemony. The Italian delegation, moreover, had proposed to strengthen the executive power of the national sections within the WIDF. Tomšić found this proposal more conservative than the one by the Indian delegation, which proposed to abandon the system of national delegations, transforming the WIDF into a world women’s organization with its own autonomous stance. Despite these disagreements, Vida Tomšić also expressed interest in the activities of the UDI at the national level, and sent to other SDŽ members some more material on women’s work in the cooperative sector in Italy, together with some documents on the “women’s question” produced during the Eight congress of the Italian Communist Party.<sup>44</sup> The Yugoslav militants,

41 Letter, 31.8.1957. Belgrade, Arhiv Jugoslavije, 354-9-189.

42 Letter, Ljubljana, 2.8.1957, Belgrade, Arhiv Jugoslavije, Fond 354 (SDŽT), box 9.

43 “Jasno je da to italijanske komunistkinje znaju, pa mi i zbog toga njihova formulacija o borbi za ženska prava opet izgleda preterana u drugu krajnost, zbog toga da bi na taj način formulisani zapravo borbu protiv sovjetskog dirigiranja.” Ibidem. Vida Tomšić read the Italian autonomist position only as an undirect way to criticize the Soviet position, missing out the internal debate that had taken place within the UDI and the Italian Communist Party. The idea of an autonomous women’s movement was inconceivable for Tomšić, and associated with interwar bourgeois feminism. See Sklevicky (1996).

44 Ibidem. During that congress, as mentioned earlier in this chapter, the PCI used for the first time the expression *questione femminile*, and stated in its declarations that the issue of women’s emancipation was “an integral part” of the struggle for democracy and socialism. See

therefore, were encouraged to make use of this material in preparation for the visit of the Italian guests.

On the 13th of September 1957, UDI president Marisa Rodano, secretary general Rosetta Longo, WIDF vice-President Maria Maddalena Rossi and socialist WIDF leader Giuliana Nenni traveled to Ljubljana. WIDF secretary general Carmen Zanti was supposed to be present but in the end did not attend. Note the presence of UDI main leaders and of a representative of the WIDF, and of both socialist and communist women.<sup>45</sup> The Yugoslav delegation was equally composed of the highest representatives, belonging to the Directive Committee of the Union of Women's Societies (SDŽ). Many of them were also former partisans and were important functionaries of the League of Communists at the Federal or Republican level. They were: Vida Tomšić, Mara Načeva, Milka Kufrin, Blaženka Mimica, Aleksandra Janda, Marija Šoljan-Bakarić, Angelca Očeppek, Olga Vrabčić, Ada Krivić, Meta Košir, Majda Gaspari, Jelica Marič.<sup>46</sup> The discussions between the Italian and the Yugoslav delegation are reported in detail by Vida Tomšić to a meeting of the Directive Committee of the SDŽ concerning the international relations of the organization, held on the 27th of September 1957.<sup>47</sup> Vida Tomšić describes at length the exchanges with the Italian delegation in Ljubljana.

The Yugoslav and Italian representatives briefly talked about the WIDF. The Yugoslav delegates openly expressed their long-standing criticisms of the WIDF, formulated ever since their expulsion from the organization in 1949. They acknowledged that the organization had enlarged its scope since the Beijing Congress, by including Asian and African women's organizations, and by dealing with "women's problems" more concretely. On the other hand, the WIDF continued to be comprised mainly

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Rodano 2010, 106-107. According to Rodano, while these declarations constituted a "watershed", in practice many male PCI leaders opposed UDI's autonomous organizing at the local level, and the fact that women "tried to do politics by themselves". Few months after the congress Togliatti himself sent a letter to the different PCI federations, about the need to apply the party line and to stop having a "double standard" towards female cadres.

45 According to Terzuolo, PCI's good relationships with the LCY during these years are also the result of a commitment to cooperation with the Italian Socialist Party (Terzuolo 1985: 199).

46 Correspondence AFŽ-UDI of July – August 1957. Rome, Archivio Centrale UDI, fondo DnM, 53.3-22, f. 9, 1957.

47 Sastanak Upravni Odbor SDŽ, 27.9.1957, fond 354 (SDŽJ), k. 1 (Zapisnici I stenografske sa sastanka upravnog odbora I sekretariata SDŽJ I sa savetovanja SZDJ 1954-1961), Arhiv Jugoslavije, Belgrade. While opening the meeting, Marija Koš summarized the recent developments in SDŽ international relations, referring to the UDI as the only Western European organization belonging to the WIDF with whom the SDŽ had a bilateral relation. Vida Tomšić stressed the need to become more active in the relations with India, Indonesia, and the Arab countries, since the WIDF was also getting more active on that front. She then summarized the recent contacts she had with Soviet women. She recalled the holiday she had in the Soviet Union, and her discussions with Lidia Petrova and Nina Popova about possible common initiatives. They discussed of having a seminar on women's lives under socialism. Vida Tomšić openly told to the Soviet representatives that she agreed with the idea, but only if the seminar would take into account concrete problems, without portraying women's condition in the Soviet Union as ideal (as in the film produced by the WIDF, *La rose des vents*, see previous section).

of organizations with explicit ties to communist parties and was thus implicitly affiliated to the socialist bloc. For these reasons, the Yugoslavs did not trust the WIDF enough to join it again. They complained that the expulsion of the AFŽ had not been explained in detail, and that they had no guarantee that something similar would not happen again in the future. Vida Tomšić also urged the UDI representatives to “fight a bit more” for change within the Federation, since it was already clear in the Helsinki meeting that one of their delegates had expressed a very critical position.<sup>48</sup> On the topic of the decision-making process within the WIDF, Tomšić opposed WIDF Resolutions that would be binding for each affiliated member. A resolution on “equal pay for equal work”, for instance, argued Tomšić, could be useful in Italy but not in India, since different women’s organizations in different countries have different priorities. In this way she was advocating the principles of “national ways to socialism”, and of national sovereignty, as they were being developed in Yugoslavia and in the Non-Aligned Movement.

The Italian guests thanked the Yugoslav women and agreed that there was a need to work together in order to change the Federation from within. At the same time, they declined to discuss the WIDF in greater detail. Only WIDF vice-president Maria Maddalena Rossi indirectly called upon the Yugoslav leaders to re-enter the WIDF, referring to the need for national women’s organizations to combat “provincialism” by joining an international women’s organization. She also added that the WIDF was enlarging its scope and working methods, and that within the Federation there was enough space to accommodate various national positions.<sup>49</sup> The issue of the WIDF was, however, soon abandoned; Tomšić had the impression that the Italian representatives did not want to act as the ambassadors of the Federation. In fact, the Yugoslav leader felt that the Italian guests were themselves unsure of their stance towards the Federation, since the organization was undergoing a phase of internal transformation, which had also created a crisis in the relationship between the UDI and the WIDF.<sup>50</sup>

In private, even Maria Maddalena Rossi, who seemed like a pro-Soviet hardliner, admitted that the Federation needed to be transformed, and added: “It is very difficult to work for the Federation.”<sup>51</sup> She mentioned the resistance of the French women and of the Brazilian president Bianca Fialco; the Russian women, in her view, were much more open and knew what had to be done. Rossi also mentioned that during the meeting of the Executive Committee in Rome the UDI proposed a name change, removing the word “Federation” and changing the name to “Women’s World Alliance” (*Svetski Savez Žena*).<sup>52</sup> Many women opposed this move and accused Rossi of wanting

48 Ibidem.

49 Ibidem.

50 Ibidem.

51 “Madalena Rosi, koja je potpredsednica Federacije i koja stalno ističe da Federacija mora postojati kakva da je, priznala mi je i rekla u četiri oka ‘sve ovo mi osećamo i moram da kazem da je strašno teško raditi u Federaciji.’” Ibidem.

52 “One su u Rimu imale sastanak Izvršnog komiteta i predložile da se izmeni ime organizacije tako da bude Svetski Savez Žena a da se izostavi rec ‘Federacija’. [Rossi] kaze: ‘bilo je suza, mene su napadale žene kao da sam ubila Federaciju, vole Federaciju i sada sam u Helsinkiju

to “kill the Federation”.<sup>53</sup> During their exchange, Rossi and Tomšić speculated about what would happen if the Federation would be dissolved. Tomšić argued that if an organization does not work anymore it should be rather be dissolved, but that in the case of the Federation it was worth trying to change it from within, also in light of the recent changes in the Soviet Union.<sup>54</sup>

During the bilateral meeting in Ljubljana, Vida Tomšić had the general impression that Italian women were not trying to persuade the Yugoslav women to change their attitude, but were rather trying to find some alliances to strengthen their own position within the Federation.<sup>55</sup> This impression is confirmed by Marisa Rodano's memoir, in which she recalls that the UDI tried to establish international alliances outside and within the WIDF, in order to foster the new line on “women's emancipation” (see Rodano, 2010: 113). The Yugoslav position about the Federation – cooperating on issues of mutual interest on the basis of the different national contexts – partially coincided with the Italian goal of turning women's rights into the main mission of the WIDF. As aptly summarize by Tomšić, in fact, Italian representatives aimed to change the priorities of the Federation from “peace-women-children” to “women-children-peace”.<sup>56</sup>

The opinions expressed by the UDI in Ljubljana, together with Vida Tomšić's critical assessment of them, demonstrate the UDI and SDŽ leaders' political agency regarding internal and international matters, particularly apparent in the UDI leaders' active role in reframing women's autonomous organizing at the international level. These reports also show how in the mid-1950s UDI and SDŽ representatives, on the basis of their national experience, established transnational forms of cooperation, in order to transform the functioning and role of the Women's International Democratic Federation. The relationship between the UDI and the WIDF became even more complex in the following years. In 1963, in fact, in an unprecedented gesture of protest, the UDI delegation collectively left the main assembly during the WIDF Moscow Congress<sup>57</sup>, and subsequently decided to change its status in the Federation from adhering member (*membro aderente*) to associated member (*membro associato*), thus adopting a stance similar to that of the Yugoslav delegation.

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osečala da smo ostali kod starog.” Ibidem.

53 Ibidem.

54 Ibidem.

55 “Naš je utisak bio da su Italijanke više tražile naše argumente za svoje stanove, nego sto su one mislile da ce nas ubediti u to da promenimo svoj stav.” Ibidem.

56 Ibidem.

57 This event has been generally framed within UDI historiography as Italian women «saying NO to Moscow» (see Michetti, Repetto and Viviani 1998: 167). In fact, the reasons behind this gesture appear to be quite complex, and have also to do with the expression of Third World women's radical anti-imperialist positions within the WIDF. See the volume curated by UDI (1963) on the conference. See also Pojmann (2009).

#### 2.4. Women's questions: autonomy, contraception and abortion

During the bilateral meeting in Ljubljana, besides discussing international matters, Italian and Yugoslav leaders also compared notes on their respective work at the national level. UDI and SDŽ members developed an ongoing reflection and a deep engagement on how to improve women's lives in Italy and Yugoslavia, as is evident in the accounts of the Ljubljana meeting. The exchange of views appears to be open and constructive, less ideological than in the late 1940s, and encompasses a range of issues to do with women's life and labour. During this transnational dialogue, the Yugoslav representatives acknowledged that women's equality in Yugoslavia had not yet been achieved in practice, despite the advanced legislation. The Italian representatives, for their part, presented their current campaigns, such as the one about "equal pay for equal work" and the campaign for a state pension for housewives, and freely talked about women's lives in the villages, particularly in the South of Italy.<sup>58</sup> On the second day of their visit, Marisa Rodano and Maria Maddalena Rossi were taken by the Yugoslav colleagues to visit an institute for progressive household planning (*Zavod za napredek gospodinjstva*) in Bežigrad, and met with an architect in charge of household planning. They discussed the different innovations in household planning, domestic appliances and school canteens. The Italian guests were particularly interested in the collective laundries developed in Yugoslavia, and planned to order some to be installed in the city of Bologna.

The general assumption is that issues such as contraception and abortion only started to be discussed with the advent of second wave feminism. Cold War women's organizations have been represented as mainly focused on women's equality in the public sphere and as scarcely preoccupied with issues of family, sexuality and the private sphere. As the reports about the Ljubljana meeting show, however, in the mid-1950s women's organizations in Italy and Yugoslavia were starting to debate these issues locally and internationally. In the summer of 1956 the UDI magazine *Noi Donne* had published an editorial (signed by Giuliana dal Pozzo) entitled "As many as we want, when we want them?" (*Quanti ne vogliamo, quando li vogliamo?*), initiating a debate about contraception and responsible motherhood. During the meeting in Ljubljana, the UDI leaders discussed the discrimination against women within the family in Italy, and spoke of the difficulty of legalizing contraception and divorce because of the opposition of the Catholic Church. During their stay, moreover, Giuliana Nenni and Rosetta Longo were taken to visit a centre for family planning. The Italian guests seemed very interested in the fact that many citizens attended the center, and discussed contraception methods, particularly the diaphragms produced in Yugoslavia, with the Yugoslav doctors.

In Yugoslavia abortion (for medical reasons and in cases of extreme social distress) had been legalized in 1952. To access abortion women had to submit to the

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<sup>58</sup> The theme of women's lives in the countryside remained a topic of common interest. In the 1960s, Italian and Yugoslav women's organizations frequently sent delegations to their respective seminars on this topic.

decision of a commission of medical experts. After having reported about the meeting with the Italian guests, Vida Tomšić went on to outline the situation of contraception and abortion in Yugoslavia. While speaking with the Italian guests about these issues, in fact, it became clear to her that “this is a women’s question, and if our organization does not deal with it, no one else will.” Tomšić argued with her fellow comrades that the SDŽ had to address the issue more systematically, by advancing the diffusion of contraception. The diffusion of contraception in fact, according to Tomšić, was lower than it could be, also due to women’s reticence about their private life.<sup>59</sup>

While discussing abortion and contraception in the Yugoslav context, Tomšić also showed her awareness of international developments on the theme of abortion and contraception, comparing the policies in the Soviet Union, China, India and the United States. She suggested borrowing some of the methods of the American Planned Parenthood organization, which she had visited during a stay in New York. The Yugoslav leader opposed the Malthusianism of the Planned Parenthood organization on the basis of her Marxist beliefs. Nevertheless, she argued that the American methods could be borrowed to enhance the diffusion of contraception in order to diminish abortions and “liberate women from fear”. The communist leader, was acutely aware that sexuality and reproduction were terrains on which women’s organizations had to engage urgently.<sup>60</sup>

Organizational matters were also a matter of discussion during the 1957 Ljubljana meeting. The UDI and SDŽ leaders debated about the functioning and roles of women’s organizations, and about their degree of autonomy from political parties and international politics. The discussion addressed a question which was to become a longstanding topic of debate within transnational feminism, namely to what extent women’s organizations had to get involved in broader geopolitical issues. During the events in Hungary, explained the UDI leaders, their organization took a stance different from that of the communist and socialist parties, condemning the use of force and demanding a peaceful resolution of the crisis. This autonomous position managed to keep socialist and communist women together and to maintain the unity of the organization. To this, Vida Tomšić replied that she found this position “weak” (*bleda*, lit. “pale”). The Yugoslav leader asked if the UDI, in order to gather larger numbers of women, would avoid taking explicit political positions, or would advocate pacifism on various international problems from now on. The Italian leaders, however, replied that on certain issues such as “imperialism, colonialism and war-mongering” they would always take a stance, since the UDI represented a part of progressive public opinion in Italy.<sup>61</sup>

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59 “Žene imaju razne teškoće, a posto je to iz intimnog života većina njih smatra da treba da pati i ne iznosi.” Ibidem. About the usage of abortion as a contraceptive method among Yugoslav women who had migrated to France, see Morokvasić (1981).

60 The abortion law was revised and further liberalized in 1960. Almost two decade later, in 1974, Vida Tomšić redrafted the family provisions of the new Yugoslav Constitutions, including a provision that stated that men and women had the right to freely decide about childbirth in the family.

61 “No, one su rekly, i mislim da je to vrlo važno i potrebno u Italiji, s vremena na vreme



The relation between the UDI and the other political forces in Italy was also discussed, with UDI leaders explaining that in order to establish a successful women's mass organization in the Italian context, it was necessary for the organization to be autonomous, not linked to the communist or socialist party. They also explained that the work "on the ground" was hard, since many PSI and PCI members, including women, did not understand the new line of the UDI.<sup>62</sup> And then, according to Vida Tomšić, UDI women stated that within the party "*they were accused and are still accused of having become feminists*". They, however, explained that since women's conditions in Italy were intimately connected to the capitalist structure of the country and to the changes in that structure, every step taken by women – whether economic, social, or in terms of marriage rights – would be a step forward in the resolution of political problems." For these reasons, UDI women were "not retreating from the struggle against the political system, but fighting on the side of the progressive forces, *not as feminists against the men*, but rather against the system, against prejudices, capitalist exploitation and so on."<sup>63</sup>

This passage demonstrates that the UDI had to walk a tightrope when arguing for (partial) autonomy from political parties. When UDI leaders stepped out from their subordinate role to their respective parties, and argued that the struggle for women's emancipation was already a form of struggle for social change, they were accused of "having become feminists". This accusation – as in the case of the AFŽ (see Chapter 6) – indicates that the UDI had reached a certain organizational autonomy in the mid-1950s, and that their members used their political agency to strengthen women's rights, even if they rejected any possible feminist affiliation. The autonomy of the organization was certainly limited and hierarchical in comparison to 1970s second wave feminist elaborations. In the context of 1950s Italy, however, it represented the most advanced reflection on the "women's question", one that took into account women's oppression on a national and international scale, in its intersections with poverty, injustice and exploitation.

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o krupnim pitanjima – imperijalizma, kolonijalizma, protiv huskaca na rat etc. – da se i one izjasnjavaju, jer ipak predstavljaju jedan deo progresivnog javnog mišljenja." Ibidem.

62 Ibidem.

63 Emphasis added. "Njima su tu prebacivali i još uvek prebacuju da su postale feministkinje, ali one objasnjavaju njima položaj žena u Italiji kakav je, da je životno vezan na kapitalističku strukturu zemlje i na promene te strukture, da svaki korak – ženskih, ekonomskih, društvenih ili bračnih prava, koji ce ostvariti, podrazumevaće i predstavljati i korak napred u rešavanju političkih problema. Zbog toga se ne izključuju iz borbe protiv političkog sistema, jer se bore na strani progresivnih snaga, ali se ne bore feministički protiv muškaraca, nego se bore protiv sistema, predrasuda, kapitalističkog iskorisćavanja, itd." Ibidem.

### 3. The difficult reconciliation in the Italo-Yugoslav border area

Despite the reconciliation and cooperation between Italian and Yugoslav women's organizations in the mid-1950s, women's transnational and inter-ethnic cooperation was still not always easy. The situation in the border area, in particular, remained tense. In the mid-1950s, the contested status of the border city of Trieste was finally settled, contributing to an easing of geopolitical tensions.<sup>64</sup> After several rounds of negotiations between the United States, the Soviet Union, Italy and Yugoslavia, the London Memorandum of October 1954 assigned the city of Trieste and Zone A to Italy, while Zone B remained under Yugoslav jurisdiction.<sup>65</sup> When Trieste was assigned to Italy, the dismantling of the Allied Military Government (AMG) caused great economic precariousness in the city, which was already coping with a housing shortage due to the arrival of refugees from the areas assigned to Yugoslavia. This economic situation, and the constant political tensions in the area, impelled thousands of its residents, particularly those who had worked for the Allies, to emigrate to Australia from 1954 onwards (Sluga 2001: 155).

Also within the communist milieu of Trieste, the feeling of uncertainty and precariousness was widespread after the definitive passage of the city to Italy. As in the previous years (see Chapters 4 and 5), because of the contested status of the city the situation experienced by communist militants in Trieste was markedly different from that experienced by other PCI militants in the rest of the Italian peninsula. When looking at the reactions of Triestine militants towards geopolitical changes in the mid-1950s, notably the Soviet-Yugoslav reconciliation and the de-Stalinization process launched by Khrushchev during the Twentieth Congress, one notices the specificity of political experiences in Trieste, and the immediate relevance of global geopolitical shifts for the political life of the city, which had become a microcosm of Cold War tensions.

As mentioned earlier, the Cominform Resolution had split left-wing organisations in the Italo-Yugoslav border area. In 1955, after years of violent rivalries with the Titoists (*titini*), many Triestine communists – including the leaders of the *Unione Donne Democratiche*, UDD (Union of Democratic Women) – were not ready to accept the reconciliation between Yugoslavia and the rest of the socialist bloc. Many Triest-

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64 The situation at the Italo-Yugoslav border had reached a critical point in summer/autumn 1953, with the so-called “crisis of Trieste”, characterized by a diplomatic crisis between the Italian and the Yugoslav government over the repartition of the zone A and B of the Free Territory of Trieste. In October 1953, the Allies announced the assignment of zone A to Italian jurisdiction. Italian and Yugoslav troops were amassed at the border of zone A and B, with concrete risks of an international conflict.

65 This border settlement, however, was formally ratified and became definitive only in 1975, with the Treaty of Osimo (see Novak 1970). The border between zone A and B, established in 1947, reinforced in 1954 and finally ratified in 1975, was never completely sealed, differently than other East-West borders during the Cold War: “with varying levels of restriction, throughout the 60-year history of the border, locals crossed it legally or illegally from the very first to the very last day of its existence” (Škrlić, 2012: 63).

tine communists had welcomed the Cominform Resolution. The Soviet denunciation of Yugoslav leaders as 'nationalists', in fact, conformed to the everyday experience of Yugoslav hegemony over the leftist forces in the border area. Especially for many Italian militants living in Trieste, the Resolution brought an end to Yugoslav hegemony and a return to the strategic line promoted by PCI leader Palmiro Togliatti.<sup>66</sup>

In 1955 Khrushchev disowned the 1948 excommunication of Yugoslavia as a Stalinist machination (plotted by the chief of the Soviet secret police, Beria), and redeemed Tito and his collaborators. In an unprecedented gesture of insubordination against the PCI party line, the chief of Triestine communists Vittorio Vidali made public in a local newspaper his disagreement with Khrushchev's declarations, since "we supported that Resolution [...] with our documents, our sufferings, our experiences, without the intervention of Beria or imperialist agents."<sup>67</sup> This divergence in opinion, in fact, according to Vidali, corresponded, "at least on the basis of our experiences, to the objective truth." The fight against Yugoslavia, he argued, "was meditated, conscious, and not an act of blind discipline."<sup>68</sup> The case of Vidali's resistance to the official Soviet and PCI line indicates the importance of subjective, situated experiences with regard to communist engagement. The Triestine communist leadership, placed in the first line of Cold War ideological and national conflicts, could not easily accept the Soviet-Yugoslav reconciliation, since it contrasted with their own subjective experiences and beliefs.

The importance of experience and affect concerning Triestine militants' subjectivities is quite apparent, particularly when looking at internal meetings between the national leadership of the Italian Communist Party and the Triestine leadership. After Vidali's statement, in fact, all Trieste party leaders were asked to travel to Rome for a PCI Leadership meeting, in which they were harshly reprimanded for this gesture, and forced to publicly apologise.<sup>69</sup> The transcriptions of these meetings<sup>70</sup> could serve as a case study for contemporary identity politics and affect theory. The speeches by Triestine militants are, in fact, full of emotions and passion, highlighting the dramatic individual and collective divisions that marked Trieste in the early Cold War period, and how Cold War political identities could become totalizing for communist militants.

In front of the PCI leadership in Rome, Triestine militants described the Cominform Resolution as their "Gospel", and declared that they could not accept that the Cominform Resolution had been false, "since [their] personal experience corresponded to the Resolution." One militant says: "We have full confidence in the land of

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66 See Terzuolo (1985: 146-147). About the different strategies of the Italian and Yugoslav communist parties after 1945, and about their clash in Trieste, see Karlsen (2010).

67 Vittorio Vidali, 'Le dichiarazioni del compagno Khrushchev ed i comunisti triestini', *Il Lavoratore*, 30.5.1955; see also Longo's reply on *L'Unità*, 1.6.1955.

68 Ibidem.

69 PCI Secretariat meetings of 7th and 8th of June 1955. Fondo Mosca, Verbali Segreteria 1944-48, MF194, Istituto Gramsci, Rome.

70 Verbali della segreteria del PCI del 7 e 8 giugno 55, MF 194, Istituto Gramsci, Rome.

socialism, but one should also take our suffering into account, we have dignity, too.”<sup>71</sup> Another militant recognizes that “sentiment” is taking over in this affair. When invited by PCI leaders to apologize, the Triestine party members do not see why they should, since they only voiced their own personal truth, against the new Truth promoted by the Soviet leadership. Triestine leader Marija Bernetić replies: “We have been influenced by the base, by the Slovenes and the Italians, at home and in the street. I said this so that you would not think that we cannot think with our own head.”<sup>72</sup>

As recalled in the beginning of the chapter, these sudden shifts in “Truth” were upsetting for many militants in Trieste, and also for female leaders such as Marija Bernetić and Laura Weiss. After already having considered leaving the PCI in 1956, Laura Weiss decided to resign in 1960 from her position as director of the Union of Democratic Women (*Unione Donne Democratiche* – UDD), since she was opposed to the entry of a group of former ‘Titoist’ Slovene women (part of the women’s section of the Independent Socialist Union (*Unione Socialista Indipendente* – USI) into the organisation.<sup>73</sup> In 1960, moreover, Jole Defferri, representative of the UDD in Trieste, wrote to the leaders of the UDI in Rome about the difficult reconciliation between UDD and USI women, and reminded them that USI women, “being a group of women for the majority, if not totally, Slovenes, some of their representatives have conducted in these years a campaign of denigration against the UDI, since, [*in their view*] being the association of the Italian women, it could not defend the interests of Slovenian women in our territory”.<sup>74</sup> Defferri feared that the entry of USI women into the UDD would compromise the “need to enlarge our ranks among Italian women.”<sup>75</sup>

These episodes indicate that despite the official reconciliation between Yugoslav and Italian women’s organizations in the mid-1950s, national and ideological tensions persisted in the border area of Trieste. The divided memories created by the Cominform Resolution outlasted the Soviet-Yugoslav reconciliation. This reconciliation was also a blow for those Italian militants who had been persecuted within Yugoslavia for siding with the Cominform in 1948-49. Some of them were still imprisoned in 1955, and only an intervention of PCI leader Longo during a visit to Tito led to their release. When they came out of jail, heavily traumatized, they had to face the great indifference of the Italian Communist Party, for which they were the uncanny reminders of an historical episode that had to be erased (Bonelli 1994).<sup>76</sup> Their personal dossiers and files

71 Ibidem.

72 Ibidem.

73 Letters reproduced in Andri et al. 2003.

74 The usage of indirect speech makes the quotation unclear, but I interpret it in this way: Defferri expresses her disagreement with USI’s allegation according to which UDI, “being the association of the Italian women, could not defend the interests of Slovenian women in our territory.”

75 Jole Defferri (Unione Donne Democratiche/Zveza Demokraticnih Žena) to Comitato di Presidenza UDI, 6.5.1960. Rome, Archivio Centrale UDI, fondo DnM, 60-3-27, f.9.

76 In 1978 former Cominformist Alfredo Bonelli tried to interview a woman, L.P., who had been Cominformist in Rijeka. The woman was scared and denied any affiliation to the organization. Bonelli thus concluded that the attitude of this woman “was in itself a document:

were destroyed after the Soviet-Yugoslav reconciliation – allegedly by Marija Bernetić – making any historical reconstruction very difficult. The episodes mentioned in this section show the multiple contradictions faced by communist militants in 1956, and the degree of “selective remembering” involved in the De-Stalinization process. In 1956 Italy and Trieste, the subjective truth of individual militants often collided with the new ‘politically useful’ Truth promoted by the Soviet and PCI leaderships.

## Conclusion

In this chapter I dealt with the Cold War geopolitical context of the mid-1950s and examined its complex effects on women’s organizations in Italy, Yugoslavia and the Italo-Yugoslav border area. Khrushchev’s “Secret Speech” at the Twentieth Congress of the CPSU, the Soviet reconciliation with Yugoslavia and the suppression of the Hungarian Revolution had a longstanding impact not only on world politics, but also on the political subjectivities of communist militants across East and West, in Italy, Yugoslavia and in the city of Trieste. Soviet hegemony was no longer taken for granted in the international workers’ movement, and neither was the hierarchical relationship between the leadership of the party and its militants. In the case of Trieste, communist militants themselves contested the Soviet-Yugoslav reconciliation, and rejected the idea of a “politically useful” Truth, as Laura Weiss aptly described it. As shown in the last section of the chapter, specific national and ideological divisions persisted in the Italo-Yugoslav border area and in the city of Trieste. Transnational and inter-ethnic cooperation was difficult to re-establish after the divisions created by the Cominform Resolution in 1948.

While accounting for the specific situation of Trieste in the last part of the chapter, in the first and second part of the chapter I described how the geopolitical changes of 1956 opened up new possibilities for internal debate and for transnational cooperation for the leaders of Italian and Yugoslav women’s organizations. The leaders of the Union of Italian Women benefited from the beginnings of de-Stalinization. In the need to preserve the unity of the organization despite the end of the alliance between the PCI and PSI, the UDI gradually developed a position of organizational autonomy towards Italian left-wing parties. The UDI shifted the emphasis once again onto women’s emancipation, understood as a “national” question not subordinate to class politics, but representing a progressive goal in itself. This renewed focus on women’s emancipation and organizational autonomy had important repercussions internationally, since UDI leaders attempted to transform the role and functioning of the Women’s International Democratic Federation, of which they had been founding members since 1945.

The critique of the WIDF developed by Italian leaders led to bilateral and transnational discussions on the goals and functions of a women’s world organization. As this

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it confirmed the atmosphere of fear, repression, retaliations and blackmailing that was created around the Cominform and around us, cominformists of the party apparatus back then.” Archivio Bonelli, IRSML, Trieste.

chapter has made evident, with the advent of decolonization movements, reflections about the “women’s question” circulated not only across the Italo-Yugoslav border and across East and West; they also traveled within the Third World itself. Women’s transnational connections between the First, Second and Third World have also been analyzed in a number of recent scholarly works.<sup>77</sup> Third World women’s organizations affiliated to the decolonization movements were particularly critical of the methods of the WIDF. As recalled by Marisa Rodano (2010: 116), WIDF secretary general Carmen Zanti was aware of the crisis of the Federation. Zanti mentioned that many Asian and African organizations were thinking of leaving the WIDF to create their own Afro-Asian women’s organization.

In February 1958, in fact, an Afro-Asian Conference on Women was held in Colombo, Indonesia, affiliating twenty-nine women’s organizations from the countries that had taken part in the Bandung conference. As Bier (2010: 150) argues in her article about Egyptian women’s organizations after Bandung,

patterns of global feminism (...) shifted in accordance with the dramatic political changes that occurred during the early cold war and postcolonial periods. But these shifts were not mere reflections of geopolitical transitions then current. Rather, the role of “Third World” women and their organizations must be understood as active and therefore vital in the shaping of these new and evolving global orders.

In this chapter, I demonstrated the connections between “Third World” women and Yugoslav women, underlining the active role played by Yugoslav female leaders within the Non-Aligned Movement. In the mid-1950s the Union of Women’s Societies of Yugoslavia had already established a number of links with other women’s organizations in Asia (particularly Egypt, India and Indonesia). In 1956 Yugoslav female leaders re-entered the WIDF as critical observers, engaging in a dialogue not only between West and East, but also between the Second and the Third World. The Yugoslavs’ critique of Soviet hegemony within the WIDF was informed by Yugoslavia’s expulsion from the socialist bloc in 1948, but it was also connected to the international ideal of “national ways to socialism”. This idea could be translated, in the case of Yugoslav women’s organizations, as “national ways to women’s emancipation”, as made evident by the statements by Vida Tomšić contained in this chapter.

In 1956 and 1957, therefore, Italian and Yugoslav women’s organizations found common ground in their critique of the Women’s International Democratic Federation and in their focus on the “concrete problems” of women’s emancipation. As I have described in this chapter, during the 1957 Ljubljana meeting UDI and SDŽ leaders had important exchanges about international matters such as the WIDF, Western imperialism and the Hungarian crisis. They also discussed the most urgent “women’s issues” in Italy and Yugoslavia, namely women’s entry into the labor market, welfare

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77 See Bier (2010), for an account of women’s South-South connections after Bandung. See Castledine (2008), about connections between South African and African American women’s movements in the postwar period. On the connections between anti-apartheid South African activist Lillian Ngoyi and the WIDF, see Caine (2010).

provisions for working mothers and housewives, women's lives in the countryside and in underdeveloped regions, marriage, divorce, contraception and abortion.

While showing how Cold War geopolitical changes shaped women's organizations in Italy, Yugoslavia and the Italo-Yugoslav border area, the chapter showed how women's organizations in Italy and Yugoslavia – and particularly their leaders – in turn played a significant role in Cold War history and politics in the years 1955-1957. Former partisans and communist leaders such as Carmen Zanti and Vida Tomšić contributed to shape internal and international politics with their engagement and their political experience. Against a flattening, homogeneous view of communist women as deprived of agency, this chapter supports the three main theses of the dissertation. First, antifascist women were active participants in Cold War political struggles. Secondly, women's antifascist organizations allowed the circulation of emancipatory reflections about the "women's question" across Cold War borders. Finally, women's organizations such as the Union of Italian Women and the Union of Women's Societies of Yugoslavia, while being characterized by an pedagogic, top-down approach, were nonetheless crucial in promoting women's political, economic and social rights in Cold War Italy and Yugoslavia.

When the geopolitical situation started to be more open after 1956, the leaders of the UDI managed to carve out a limited space of organizational autonomy and to strengthen their focus on women's emancipation, refusing to subordinate the struggle for women's rights to class struggle and to the task of realizing a socialist society. In Yugoslavia, SDŽ leaders saw the resolution of the "women's question" as intrinsically linked with socialist economic progress. At the same time, they were deeply aware of women's everyday problems, and thus attempted to "mainstream" women's issues within decentralized local institutions. While UDI and SDŽ leaders rejected *feminism* on the basis of their Marxist beliefs, they could easily be accused of *having become feminists*. This proves, in my view, that UDI and SDŽ leaders' engagement towards women's emancipation was sincere, unfaltering, and exceptional for their times.

## Concluding remarks and suggestions for future research

The feminists – or other critical intellectuals as nomadic subjects – are those who have a peripheral consciousness and have forgotten to forget injustice and symbolic poverty: their memory is activated against the stream; they enact a rebellion of subjugated knowledges.  
(Rosi Braidotti 2011a: 60)

In formulating a conclusion to this research, let me return to where I began. Having grown up in “red Bologna”, amidst family memories of antifascism, I was struck by the silence surrounding antifascist women’s political and social activism after 1945, and I wanted to activate memory against this forgetting. While women’s participation in the antifascist Resistance in Italy and Yugoslavia had been studied in detail by feminist historians, antifascist women’s activism in the Cold War period has remained under-researched, both at the local and at the transnational level. By constructing an historical narrative about women’s thriving political and social activism in Cold War Italy and Yugoslavia, I have aimed to contribute to the overcoming of this scholarly gap. I have argued that antifascist women’s organizations played an active role in everyday Cold War politics in Italy and Yugoslavia. I have shown that their leaders designed a progressive agenda for women’s organizations, fighting against long-standing gendered discrimination and violence, and fostering women’s political, social and economic rights. What is more, I have demonstrated that during the early Cold War period Italian and Yugoslav antifascist women’s organizations provided women with imaginary and physical connections across borders, not only between East and West but also between the West, the Second World and the Third World.

I have sustained these theses through extensive empirical research and data gathering, analyzing a wide array of archival documents, autobiographical sources and oral history interviews in Italian, Serbo-Croatian, Slovenian and French. These sources were treated as complementary, and brought together into a single historical narrative, through a process of translation. This process of translation implied a dialogue not only across different languages, but also across different political and epistemic viewpoints (Iveković 2010). By bringing together a multiplicity of national and ideological viewpoints, this thesis attempts to go beyond the divided memories of Fascism and Second World War in the region of Southern and South-Eastern Europe (Müller 2002). The comparison between Italy and Yugoslavia, moreover, challenged the historical legacy of Cold War mental mappings, which still frame our contemporary scholarly perspectives when it comes to the study of women’s activism in the Western, post-socialist, and non-Western world (Chary and Verdery 2009; Hemmings 2011). By bringing together



primary sources in different languages, I contribute to the growing field of comparative European women's history. As suggested by historian Karen Offen (2010: 156), a comparison between primary sources in different languages is crucial to trans-European comparative research. This is a way to do justice to the "multicultural, multinational society that we know as Europe, especially (but not only) in the post-World War II, post-colonial, and post-Communist era."

By adopting a multi-lingual, transnational perspective on Cold War politics, this dissertation constitutes a form of "entangled history" (Werner and Zimmermann 2006) of women's antifascist and internationalist activism in Italy and Yugoslavia between 1945 and 1957. It establishes a dialogue across scholarly disciplines and fields that have been rarely put into communication, namely women's and feminist history, Cold War political history, post-socialist and post-colonial studies. It also contributes to each one of these fields in an innovative way. This concluding chapter details the theoretical and methodological contributions made to these different fields, as well as possible directions for future research.

First, I stress the contribution made to the field of women's and feminist history, particularly to the growing literature about women's transnational activism during the Cold War. Also, I reflect on the implications of the dissertation for contemporary Italian, post-Yugoslav and European feminist genealogies. Secondly, I specify the contribution made to the field of Cold War studies, and suggest directions for future research. By showing the significance of women's activism in the production of Cold War discourses and practices, and the way in which Cold War discourses were gendered, I proved the importance of studying Cold War political, social and cultural history from a gender and women's history perspective. Finally, I point out the implications of this work for what Chari and Verdery define as "post-Cold War" scholarly research. I reflect upon the relevance of my study for contemporary post-Cold War feminist narratives, and suggest possible directions for future studies in the field of women's history and feminist historiography.

## **1. Women's transnational activism in Cold War Europe**

This research is based upon an investigation and historical comparison of the transnational relations established between two organizations founded in Italy and Yugoslavia during the antifascist Resistance, namely the Union of Italian Women (UDI) and the Antifascist Women's Front of Yugoslavia (AFŽ). As we have seen in Chapter 2, these organizations came into being to support the ongoing liberation struggle, as a result of the strategy of the antifascist popular fronts designed by the international communist movement to fight against Fascism and Nazism. A small number of politicized antifascist women constituted the core of the leadership of these organizations. As a specific case study, I have included the Union of Antifascist Italo-Slovene Women of Trieste (UDAIS). The study of this organisation is useful in exploring the influence of Italian and Yugoslav geopolitical developments in the Italo-Yugoslav border area, which became in the late 1940s a microcosm of global Cold War divides. The activities of Italian,

Yugoslav and Trieste women's organizations have been considered not only on a local level, but also in relation to the different phases of Cold War women's internationalism, and particularly in relation to the Women's International Democratic Federation (WIDF, in French *FDIF*, *Fédération Démocratique Internationale des Femmes*). The UDI, the AFŽ and the UDAIS after 1945 were in fact affiliated to this antifascist, pro-Soviet and anti-colonial women's world organization.

The last decade has seen a worldwide growth in the study of Cold War women's activism. Contrary to the prevailing image of the post-1945 period as a moment of return to order after the break in gender relations provoked by World War II, recent studies are demonstrating the existence of significant women's activism in Western Europe, Eastern Europe, the United States and Canada in the 1940s and 1950s and during the Cold War era (Cobble 2004; De Haan 2010a; Ghodsee 2010; Horowitz 1998; Laville 2002; Lerner 2002; Michaels 2010; Penn and Massino 2009; Popa 2009; Storrs 2003; Thorn 2010; Weigand 2001). The Italian and Yugoslav cases, however, have been neglected so far, and I am adding a new perspective based on these cases, by situating the history of women's activism in a broader historical and geopolitical context.

Against the anti-communist representation of internationalist women's organizations as "chains of transmissions" of Soviet propaganda, I have explored the specificities and the complexities of women's antifascist activism in Cold War Italy and Yugoslavia. I have demonstrated that women's political engagement was not only a result of Cold War ideological divides, but that it also grew out of the long-standing struggle between Fascism and antifascism in the interwar period and during World War II. Moreover, women's national identities in Italy and Yugoslavia did not disappear during their transnational encounters. Rather, as noted by scholars working on international and transnational women's movements (Carlier 2010; Rupp and Taylor 1999; Zimmermann 2005), antifascist women's national identities were reformulated and strengthened in international and transnational settings. In Chapter 3, for instance, I have shown how Italian and Yugoslav women reformulated their national and multi-national<sup>78</sup> position in international settings, particularly within the framework of the Women's International Democratic Federation (WIDF). In Chapter 7, I have exposed the ways in which the leaders of Yugoslav and Italian women's organizations formulated a critique of Soviet hegemony within the WIDF in the mid-1950s. This critique was informed by their political experiences at the local level within their own federal and national contexts.

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78 As shown throughout the dissertation, Yugoslavia was a multi-national Federation, and Yugoslav identity was conceptualized by the postwar elite as a socialist, multi-national identification which included the expression of different nationalities, affiliated by the socialist idea of "brotherhood and unity" within the Yugoslav Federation. In the case of Cold War Trieste, national demands were nonetheless expressed in foreign politics on the basis of a common South-Slavic identity and on the basis of the national rights of the Slovene national constituency (see Terzuolo 1985). About intersections of communist and nationalist ideologies, see Lenvai (1969). The idea of multi-national coexistence within a single state started to crumble during the economic crisis and the re-emergence of ethno-nationalist politics in the late 1980s, until the break-up of Yugoslavia in the 1990s. About the contested and shifting character of Yugoslavism, see Đokić (2003); Sekulić, Massey and Hodson (1994).

These examples are coherent with the observations of Werner and Zimmerman (2006) on the dynamic entanglement of transnational, national, and local scales within transnational history.<sup>79</sup>

I have described multiple forms of women's transnational activism during the Cold War period, showing that Italian and Yugoslav antifascist women's organizations provided women with imaginary and physical connections across borders, not only between the Italo-Yugoslav border and between West and East, but also between the West, the Second World and the Third World. Contrary to the representation of women's transnational activism as a post-1989 phenomenon, I have demonstrated that multiple revolutionary networks and border crossings were established despite the existence of the "Iron Curtain". In the late 1940s and early 1950s, the Adriatic region and the Italo-Yugoslav border area became an ambivalent Cold War "buffer zone". In Italy, the mass support gained by the communist party provoked the intervention of the United States in support of moderate, capitalist forces. After having been the "dutiful daughter" of the Soviet Union, and a supporter of revolutionary movements in South-Eastern Europe, Yugoslavia was expelled from the socialist bloc, and gravitated towards the Western sphere of influence. In the mid-1950s, Yugoslav authorities used their "in-between" position to co-found the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM), affiliating countries from Asia, Africa and the Middle East. As I have shown, Italian and Yugoslav antifascist women's organizations played an active role in everyday Cold War politics in Italy and Yugoslavia, and were forced to adjust their local and transnational strategies according to the aforementioned geopolitical changes: the expulsion of Yugoslavia from the socialist bloc, the de-Stalinization of 1956, which led to Soviet-Yugoslav reconciliation, and the establishment of the Non-Aligned Movement.

Through the Union of Italian Women and the Antifascist Women's Front of Yugoslavia, I have argued, many women actively took part in the political and ideological struggles of the Cold War. Women's political engagements during the Cold War were different, shifting and complex. Within the framework of the UDI and of the AFŽ, female militants took different stances, on the basis of their family and class background, their political orientation and their ethnic or national identity. Throughout this thesis, also for comparative reasons, I have mainly focused on the women who constituted the leadership of these two organizations. These women often had a great deal of political and organizational experience gained through antifascist and party activities in the interwar period, and had distinguished themselves during the antifascist Resistance. As communist (or socialist, in the case of Italy) party militants, the AFŽ and UDI leaders were appointed to lead the antifascist women's organizations on the basis of the egalitarian discourse of women's emancipation promoted by their respective parties.

As I have exemplified in Chapters 3 and 6, on the one hand the political subjectivity of antifascist female leaders passed through an identification with universal party

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79 "Within a *histoire croisée* perspective, the transnational cannot simply be considered as a supplementary level to be added to the local, regional, and national levels according to a logic of a change in focus. On the contrary, it is apprehended as a level that exists in interaction with the others, producing its own logic and feedback effects upon other space-structuring logics" (Werner and Zimmermann 2006: 43).

work, so that many of them were not keen to engage in “feminine work”, or “work among women”, a task that appeared as secondary and less valued. On the other hand, on the basis of socialist egalitarianism, many female militants genuinely engaged in the task of ameliorating women’s life conditions across their countries, promoting women’s juridical, social and economic rights. As shown in Chapter 6, AFŽ and UDI campaigns in the early Cold War period mainly targeted the illiteracy, poverty, inferiority and over-exploitation of women in the most rural, patriarchal regions of Yugoslavia and Italy. In this enormous task, AFŽ and UDI militants had to face the opposition of local male comrades, who were attached to their patriarchal privileges. Their loyalty towards women-based activism thus conflicted with their party loyalty.

This comparative analysis clearly highlights that, for this region of Europe, changes in women’s forms of political participation cannot be disconnected from broader processes of political and social change. The Italian and Yugoslav liberation movements drew into politics masses of citizens who had been previously excluded from decision-making processes, namely the working class and the peasantry. The post-’45 climate also brought an unprecedented attention towards forms of labor and exploitation, included women’s productive and reproductive labor, and towards their life conditions as workers, citizens and mothers. Within this framework of working class and peasant struggles, of antifascist Resistance and reconstruction, women entered politics in Italy and Yugoslavia. When accessing the public sphere, they demanded to end women’s traditional inferiority – as juridical beings and as human beings. The framing of the “women’s question” within Italian and Yugoslav women’s organizations cannot be separated from this context of postwar national reconstruction. The influence of the Soviet model of gender equality on the Italian and Yugoslav communist parties and women’s organizations is also particularly significant.

Because of the lack of autonomy of antifascist women’s organizations from their respective communist parties, as argued in Chapter 1, feminist historiography in Italy and Yugoslavia tended to read the history of these organizations as a missed opportunity when it comes to the subversion of traditional gender roles (Sklevicky 1989b; 1996; Casalini 2005; Kemp and Bono 1993). The feminist reading of the Cold War period as a moment of conservatism and moderation is a European phenomenon (Duchen and Bandhauer-Schoffmann 2000). The representation of the Cold War era as one in which women’s activism was lacking is even stronger in the case of Eastern European socialist countries (Penn and Massino 2009). Throughout my study I have contended that Italian and Yugoslav women’s organizations’ lack of political *autonomy* cannot be equated to a lack of political *agency*. Instead, women’s organizations played an important role locally and internationally after 1945.

At the local level, women’s organizations and their leaders strived to ameliorate women’s life conditions, at the juridical, social and economic level. Internationally, meanwhile, they took side in ongoing Cold War ideological and political struggles. As shown in Chapters 4 and 7 taking sides could mean fostering cooperation across the Italo-Yugoslav border and within the WIDE. It could also mean, however, as made evident in Chapter 5, a form of complicity with processes of Cold War othering, enemy-making and intra-communist political repression. The topic of the Soviet-Yugoslav

split of 1948, and of its impact on women's organizations, was the most difficult to untangle. On the one hand, the secondary literature on this theme is particularly scarce (see Jambrešić-Kirin 2009); on the other hand, the research showed the ambivalences of women's political agency, which did not consist only of peace making, but also of enemy making and top-down control. In different parts of the dissertation I have highlighted the ambivalence and complexity of women's political agency in the Cold War period, notably when it came to the female leaders of the UDI and the AFŽ. I have explored their position towards non-politicized women and rank-and-file members, a position that was modeled according to the Leninist, pedagogical framework of the communist left.

When looking at the ambivalences of antifascist women's organization in the Cold War period, I relied on the critique of socialist authoritarianism and Marxist ideology developed within feminist movements and feminist historiography in Italy and Yugoslavia from the 1970s onwards. As a post-Cold War feminist, I strived to enter into dialogue with the achievements of feminist historiography, while at the same time opening up the archive of women's Cold War utopian activism, which has receded from view in our current post-Cold War neo-liberal and dystopian era. In this sense, I positioned myself at the crossroad of different spatialities, temporalities, epistemologies and ideologies. Rosi Braidotti (2011a: 109) has emphasized the connection between feminist ethics and the ability to position oneself across shifting temporalities: "A feminist critical position assumes the dislocation of the linearity of time and hence the necessity to inhabit different, and even potentially contradictory, time zones simultaneously: a sort of trip through chronotopia." As Braidotti argues, "[o]n the theoretical level, feminists have developed crucial critiques of ideologies, revisions of the symbolic, and a vast array of countermodels and paradigms to configure the shifts of subjectivity actually in progress in our globalized world."

Time traveling and space traveling across Cold War and post-Cold War borders implied a journey through different forms of gendered subjectivities, epistemic paradigms and worldviews. While investigating the subjectivities of the Cold War antifascist generation, I was aware of the post-1968 feminist critique of communist dogmatism and state authoritarianism. At the same time, raised in the post-Cold War ideology of the "end of ideologies", I had to re-invent a vocabulary to narrate Cold War women's struggles against Fascism, imperialism, class divisions, exploitation, poverty and social inequalities, and in order to inscribe the stories of the antifascist generation within Italian, post-Yugoslav and European feminist genealogies. By positioning myself in different spatio-temporal locations, and by listening to the voices of women from the past, as Sklevicky (1996: 69) suggests, I hoped to strike a balance between the "unspent reserves of utopian energy" which were part of antifascist women's activism in the Cold War era, and the "mistaken choices" leading to the crushing of those same utopian energies during and after the Cold War. In the next section I will address the contribution made by this research to the field of Cold War studies.

## 2. Gendering Cold War politics

In addition to women's and feminist history, with this research I aim to contribute to the field of Cold War studies, and particularly to the contemporary debates relative to the social and cultural aspects of the postwar and Cold War period (Bessel and Schumann 2003; Caute 2003; Major and Mitter 2004). The cultural and social history of Italy, Yugoslavia and the Italo-Yugoslav border area during the Cold War has been mainly read from the perspective of political elites and military leaders. Increasingly however, studies are investigating the effect of Cold War discourses and divisions on the everyday lives of local inhabitants and citizens, including women. By showing that Cold War ideological and political discourses were gendered, and that the mobilization of discourses about women's emancipation played an important role in the construction of the political legitimacy of socialist regimes, this research has shown the importance of reading Cold War politics from a gendered perspective. Moreover, I have stressed how women's organizations, and particularly antifascist female leaders, were active producers of Cold War discourses and practices in Italy, Yugoslavia and the Italo-Yugoslav border area.

Within the field of Cold War studies there is a growing interest in transnational connections established by non-state actors, such as associations, movements and private individuals. In his survey of recent literature about transnational civil society in the Cold War era, Iriye (2004: 213) defines transnational history as "the study of movements and forces that cut across national boundaries", a definition which could well apply to Cold War women's internationalism. In order to stress the importance of physical, but also of imaginary transnational connections across borders, I have made use of the concept of "dreamworlds" coined by Buck-Morris (2000). I have indicated that Italian and Yugoslav women's antifascist organizations provided their members with physical, but also with imaginary transnational connections. Competing Cold War "dreamworlds" faced each other at the Italo-Yugoslav border, which was simultaneously the border between democracy and totalitarianism, or, inversely, the divide between imperialism and people's democracy (see also Mihelj 2009). Within the framework of the Women's International Democratic Federation, transnational encounters between women of different nationalities were organized, connecting women's movements in the West, the Second World and the Third World. Through the mediation of Cold War women's organizations, Italian and Yugoslav militants felt connected to international women's movements, from the struggles of antifascist women in fascist Spain to the anti-colonial wars of Indonesia and Algeria.

What has emerged, furthermore, is the connection between individual subjectivities and collective myths, or, in other words, the role played by affectivity in shaping Cold War political engagements. Kertzer's (1996) political ethnography of a PCI section in 1980s Bologna made evident the importance of symbols, rituals and myths in the creation of communist identities. Kertzer argued that narratives and myths of evil and salvation were fundamental to the construction of militant subjectivities: "[f]or the Italian Communists these sacred tales – tales of the October Revolution, the heroic Resistance, the battle of the working class against capitalism and imperialism – un-

derlay not only their identity but also their sense that they were the chosen people. It was they who were at the vanguard of history” (1996: 8). The antifascist Resistance was a veritable foundation myth for the Yugoslav and the Italian communist parties, and further studies are needed in order to assess the mobilization of this myth in the Cold War period (for the case of Eastern Germany, see Epstein 2003).

It would be worthwhile to investigate further how “broken myths” and sudden changes in “Truth” – such as the Soviet-Yugoslav split of 1948, or the de-Stalinization of 1956 – affected militants and common citizens in Italy, Yugoslavia and the Italo-Yugoslav border area. As shown in Chapter 5 and 7, Italian and Yugoslav left-wing forces – including antifascist women’s organizations – have been greatly affected by these geopolitical transformations. In these chapters I contribute to the specific Cold War history of the Italo-Yugoslav border area, and of the city of Trieste in particular, investigating the impact of the Soviet-Yugoslav split of 1948 and of the subsequent reconciliation of 1956 on left wing forces. I retrace the history of the Union of Antifascist Italo-Slovene Women (UDAIS), founded in 1945, which after 1948 was split into two opposing women’s organizations, a pro-Soviet (UDD) and a pro-Tito one (USI). The reactions of Trieste militants towards the process of de-Stalinization, and the difficult reconciliation between pro-Cominform and pro-Tito militants – including women – confirms that political engagements during the Cold War were not simply a matter of rational choice (Kertzer 1996). For communist militants, the political engagement assumed a totalizing aspect, which was interwoven with one’s sense of selfhood and integrity. More specific studies are necessary to investigate the long-standing divided memories provoked by the Soviet-Yugoslav split, not only in Yugoslavia, but also in Italy, the Italo-Yugoslav border area, and in other countries of South-Eastern Europe.<sup>80</sup>

When it comes to Cold War history “from below”, documentary films based on oral history interviews can be a powerful resource, and can suggest possible directions for future inquiries into the contradictions of Cold War history in the region of Southern and South-Eastern Europe. In his latest documentary, acclaimed Serbian film director Želimir Žilnik focuses precisely on the life story of a woman to retell the complex and shifting political history of South-Eastern Europe in the twentieth century. The film, titled “One Woman – One Century” (*Jedna Žena – Jedan Vek*), tells the life story of 99 years old Dragica Vitolović Srzentić, born in 1912 in Sovinjak, Istria, a village that was under the Austro-Hungarian Empire until 1919 and part of the Kingdom of Italy until 1943.<sup>81</sup> At 17 years old Dragica moved to Belgrade, then the capital of the

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80 During a conversation with Metka Gombač, archivist and historian at the Slovenian State archives in Ljubljana, she told me the story of her father-in-law, originary from a Slovene village near Trieste. After having fought side by side as partisans, he and his best friend did not speak for fifty years as a result of the Cominform Resolution. In that village, to this day, old people bitterly remember who was pro-Vidali (pro-Moscow) and who was pro-Babić (pro-Tito) in 1948. In Italy itself, the communist narrative about Tito’s “betrayal” of the socialist camp has merged with post-Cold War nationalist narratives about the violence of Yugoslav partisans’ retaliations after 1945. See Di Gianantonio (2007).

81 After 1943 the village was part of the Nazi occupied area of the *Adriatisches Kunstenland* during the war; from 1945 it became part of socialist Yugoslavia, and in 1991 of the new

Kingdom of Yugoslavia, where she got involved in left-wing revolutionary movements. As a partisan during World War II, she was sent in a private jet to London to report on the victory of the Yugoslav Resistance on the BBC in 1945. A secretary at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of socialist Yugoslavia in 1948, Dragica was personally in charge of delivering the correspondence between Tito and Stalin. Disagreeing with the Soviet-Yugoslav break, however, she was arrested and harshly persecuted for more than three years as “Cominformist”, while her husband, also part of the communist leadership, was deported to the prison camp of Goli Otok.

Despite these events, in 2011 Dragica still declared herself a “leftist” (*levičarka*). She recalled the utopian ideals of her antifascist generation, she denounced the authoritarianism of the socialist regime and finally she expressed a deep sadness for the violent break-up of Yugoslavia in the 1990s. Stories like the one of Dragica Vitolović Srzentić, therefore, seem to contain and express both the utopias of the antifascist generation and the terrible violence of twentieth century Europe. Indeed, I have demonstrated that oral history interviews and autobiographies can constitute a powerful source for a cultural and social study of the Cold War.<sup>82</sup> They can become an important complementary source for Cold War studies when archive documents are silent, or when the end of the Cold War provides researchers with the possibility to tell stories – and particularly women’s stories – that could not be narrated before.

### 3. Post-Cold War feminist narratives

While certain stories could only be told after the end of the Cold War, other stories have been forgotten or deliberately rewritten after 1989, as a result of the epistemic rupture provoked by the end of the Cold War. Marisa Rodano, former member of the Italian Communist Party and president of the UDI, wrote in her recent autobiography that “*the person who believed in the revolution is placed today in a diasporic situation; it is not the land, nor the monuments which are missing, it is the broken historical continuity, and with that the continuity and the development and the tiresome critical evolution of ideas, all that could make clear and understandable for the others, and thus, in a mirror, also for one self, the reasons of one’s own acts, of what one has been.*” (Rodano 2008a: 105. Emphasis added). Another more tragic epistemological rupture to take into account when working on the successor states of the former Yugoslavia

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independent Croatia. As Braidotti (2011a: 31) notes, “Such is the fate of borderlands in the old continent of Europe: points of transition across the multiple geographical, ethnic and linguistic dividing lines: they never sit still, but rather shift with incredible violence.”

<sup>82</sup> Another documentary dealing with the effects of sudden geopolitical events on people’s lives is *Divorce Albanian style* (Peeva, 2007). It tells the stories of Albanian male citizens who married Polish, Russian or Czech women after World War II, when internationalist brotherhood was promoted through cultural and professional exchanges. When in 1961 Albania broke off its relations with the Soviet Union and the rest of the socialist bloc, these men were forced to divorce their foreign wives, who were in turn charged with espionage and expelled from the country, or, alternatively, spent years in prison.



is the rupture provoked by “the last wars”. Feminist anthropologist, anti-war activist and pioneer of gender studies in the region, Žarana Papić (1950-2002) describes the conflicts of the 1990s as a “destabilization of the previous perception and intelligibility of the balance between past, present and future.” Papić states: “It is a new, mutated totality of the past, present, and future, dramatically imposed on all people who lived (now expelled or dead) or are still living in the region — *it is not the past we thought we knew, nor the present we thought we had been living, nor the future we thought we could foresee and expect*. The catastrophic drama of Yugoslavia’s “eventfulness” shows how the “transition” of one socio-political system may turn into a disaster for both humans and civilization”(1999: 157. Emphasis added).

When working on this study, this description of the epistemological break caused by the Yugoslav wars of the 1990s helped me to imagine how uncertain and disrupted the European landscape in 1945 must have looked. At the time, however, fascism had been defeated, and the antifascist narratives of the postwar era in Italy and Yugoslavia privilege this sense of victory and the enthusiasm for the reconstruction. In order to get on with life Europe deliberately forgot about destruction, death and the millions of war victims, particularly the Jewish victims of the Holocaust (see Bessel and Schumann, 2003). During the period going from 1945 to 1989, both Italy and Yugoslavia witnessed extraordinary changes in economic, political, social and cultural life. Both countries underwent an unprecedented period of modernization, urbanization and economic development. Education and welfare provisions were extended to the majority of Italian and Yugoslav citizens.

From 1991 onwards, the political landscape of South-Eastern Europe was once again turned upside down by violent ethnic, gendered and class warfare (Papić 1994, 2002; Iveković and Mostov 2002). This violent, dramatic “transition” – together with its hundreds of thousands of civilians killed or displaced – provoked a regression in terms of economic and social life, and a re-traditionalisation of gender relations. The wars also produced new ethnic divisions (Žarkov 2007). Significantly, the concepts of fascism and antifascism did not cease to be used in the post-Yugoslav successor states, but were invested with new meanings. In the fight against nationalism and historical revisionism, the memories of the antifascist Resistance and of the socialist past became resources to be activated against oblivion. In relation to the former Yugoslav context, scholars have noted that nostalgia can take the form of individual paralysis or collective escapism towards war responsibility and complicity (Volčić 2007); on the other hand, it can also draw on the memories of past social justice and multicultural coexistence to criticize present injustices, ethnic discriminations and amnesia, expressing a fundamental “wish for better times” (Velikonja 2008: 132–133).<sup>83</sup> In the Italian context of the 1990s and 2000s, similarly, the memory of antifascism was reactivated against the right-wing political hegemony, and against raising social inequalities, state racism and widespread violence against women. The stories of the women’s antifascist Resistance started to be re-appropriated and re-signified as resources for feminist activism,

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83 About the phenomenon of nostalgia in Eastern Europe and in the former Yugoslavia, see Todorova (2010); Luthar and Pušnik (2010).

against neo-liberal, nationalist and xenophobic “master narratives” which are dominating the contemporary post-Cold War, European context.<sup>84</sup>

Post-Cold War alternative narratives of the past, in my view, are an example of what Claire Hemmings defines as “recitation”. According to Hemmings (2011: 181) *recitation* is not the telling of a new story, but rather “a renarration of the same story from a different perspective. It operates as a breaking open of the presumed relation between the past and the present, rather than as an instantiation of a new, fixed relation between the two.” Recitation thus becomes “an intervention, a mode of engagement that values the past by understanding it affectively and politically rather than in terms of finality.” Women’s activism in the Cold War era can thus become, through recitation, a resource for post-Cold War feminist narratives, “inviting back” (Hemmings 2011) the antifascist generation in our transnational feminist genealogies.

A renewed interest in Cold War women’s activism in the successor states of the former Yugoslavia, and the possibility to combine antifascist and feminist genealogies in post-Cold War feminist narratives, is made evident by a recent feminist manifesto, ironically called: “Neo-AFŽ: Revolution without Premeditation” (Žabić 2011). The author, together with another activist friend, started to write poetry and graffiti under the name of “Neo-AFŽ” in 2001, re-appropriating the name of the Antifascist Women’s Front of Yugoslavia.<sup>85</sup> Another sign of recitation tactics is a statement made by a feminist collective in Rome for the anniversary of the Liberation, on the 25th of April 2012. The statement is titled: “We are (female) partisans, because we have decided which side we are on.”<sup>86</sup>

I see these two documents – the Neo-AFŽ manifesto and the statement by feminists

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84 “In the xenophobic social climate of contemporary Europe, these traditional values once again produce hierarchies of identities, cultures, and even civilizational belongings. In other words, the deterministic reassertion of differences introduces structural patterns of mutual exclusion at the national, regional, provincial, or even more local level. These master narratives are not “new” in any historical or theoretical sense, but they have gained a renewal of interest and a new momentum in the present context, under the combined impact of the new technologies and the triumphant, post-cold war neoliberal belief in the capitalist market economy as the allegedly highest form of human evolution” (Braidotti 2011b: 171).

85 “Considering that the organization had been gone for 50 years, the acronym was still used remarkably widely, and I remember how people in Vukovar would often joke about contemporary women’s organizations, calling us the AFŽ, not without a touch of nostalgia. In Croatia and Serbia in 2001 (...) Yugo-nostalgia grew ever stronger, for an obvious reason: it grew out of frustration with the then current state of affairs, the joblessness, the corruption and the hundreds of thousands of families torn apart and displaced as a result of the wars of the 1990s (...) *When one is unable to imagine a better future, one reimagines the past as near utopia*” (Žabić 2011: 151).

86 “We are partisans, because we have decided on which side we are (*Siamo partigiane, perché abbiamo scelto da che parte stare*). The 25th of April is the anniversary of the Liberation from Nazi-fascism. (...) The politicians will parade and bring flowers, while at the same time they will continue to attack and plunder in the name of profit (...) Being a partisan means to choose which side you are on. So, no self-absolutory parades, no complicity with those responsible for the life we are living, but autonomous and independent initiatives” (Coordinamenta femminista e lesbica di collettivi e singole-Rome, Public statement for the 25th of April 2012).

in Rome – as emblematic of the tendency of post-Cold War feminist narratives to reappropriate the antifascist legacy. At the same time, these contemporary narratives also incorporate the achievements of the feminist second wave. They revive the memory of the antifascist generation while making clear that they would not renounce to the political autonomy gained by 1970s feminism. Žabić (2011), particularly, establishes a post-Cold War feminist genealogy, which includes both the antifascist and the feminist generation. Žabić positions herself as “part of the third, post-socialist generation of feminists” and says that the Neo-AFŽ “intentionally built alliances with both of the previous generations, wary of falling into the same old traps” (Žabić 2011: 152). They thus want to avoid “starting from scratch” and perpetuating amnesia. In my thesis, similarly, I have constructed a post-Cold War narrative about women’s Cold War activism, striving to invite these stories back into the feminist genealogies from which they have been previously excluded, or marginalized. Bridging divides between languages, national borders, temporalities and generations, I have collected some Cold War stories of women’s transnational, revolutionary networks, starting from a post-Cold War, feminist perspective. In Italy and in the post-Yugoslav successor states, further investigations are needed on the actual encounters between different generations of female activists, and on the overlaps and contradictions between women’s antifascist, communist and feminist cultures after 1968.

As for trans-European and transnational feminist genealogies, I hope that this study will provoke further debates on women’s transnational networks and traveling theories during the Cold War era, not only across Europe, but also between Europe and the rest of the world. Our contemporary transnational consciousness can allow us to read Cold War women’s history in a different way, challenging the limits dictated by methodological nationalism and Cold War frameworks. By reviving the transnational history of women’s activism in the Cold War era, and by challenging imaginary dichotomies between Europe and the Balkans, or the West and the Rest, post-Cold War feminist narratives of the past can become a resource against contemporary injustice and forgetting. As Braidotti (2011b: 33) writes, “[w]hat matters ultimately about the job of remembering is the capacity to engender the kind of conditions and relations that can empower creative alternatives.”

This project is the result of a long-standing subjective investment, rooted in intersecting paths of personal remembering. A loyalty to my grandmother’s generation, the fact of growing up in a former “red city” after the end of the Cold War, and personal connections with friends from the former Yugoslavia have been crucial elements in shaping my political location. At the same time, the encounter with feminist methodologies and with gender theory have allowed me to connect the personal, the political and the academic, and to transform personal memories into a productive path of scholarly research. Feminist methodologies enabled me to investigate alternative, forgotten knowledges that were not inscribed in post-Cold War master narratives, and to establish an inter-subjective encounter with the women of the antifascist generation. This book pays homage to their different voices, hopes and ideals. It also represents a tribute to antifascist women’s deep belief in the power of education and learning, a belief that was transmitted across generations.

## List of abbreviations

AMG	–	Allied Military Government – Trieste
ANPI	–	Associazione Nazionale Partigiani Italiani/National Association of Italian Partisans
AVNOJ	–	Antifašističko Vijeće Narodnog Oslobođenja Jugoslavije/ Antifascist Council of the People's Liberation of Yugoslavia
AFŽ	–	Antifašistički Front Žena/Antifascist Women's Front *
CAW	–	Congress of American Women
CLNAI	–	Comitato di Liberazione Nazionale Alta Italia/National Liberation Committee for Upper Italy
CNL	–	Comitato di Liberazione Nazionale/National Liberation Committee
DAT	–	Donne Antifasciste Triestine/ Antifascist women of Trieste
GDD	–	Gruppi di difesa della donna e per l'assistenza ai combattenti della libertà/ Women's Groups for Defense and for the Assistance of the Freedom Fighters
HUAC	–	House Un-American Activities Committee
KDAŽ	–	Konferencija za Društvenu Aktivnost Žena/Conference for the Social Activities of Women
KPJ	–	Komunistička Partija Jugoslavije/Yugoslav Communist Party
NOV I POJ	–	Narodnooslobodilačka Vojska i partizanski odredi/ Popular liberation army and partisan detachments of Yugoslavia
SDŽ	–	Savez Ženskih Društava – Union of Women's Society
SKJ	–	Savez Komunista Jugoslavije/ League of Communists of Yugoslavia
SKOJ	–	Savez Komunističke Omladine Jugoslavije – League of Communist Youth of Yugoslavia
UAIS	–	Unione Antifascista Italo-Slava/Italo-Slav Antifascist Union

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\* Throughout the book I am using the Serbo-Croat abbreviation, AFŽ. Some authors refer to this organization with the English abbreviation, AWF. After 1953 the AFŽ was replaced by the Union of Women's Society (SDŽ). In 1961 the organization was renamed into the Conference for the Social Activity of Women (KDAŽ), and this name was maintained until the end of the socialist regime.

UDAIS/ASIŽZ – Unione Donne Antifasciste Italo-Slovene/Antifašistične  
 Slovensko-Italijanske Ženske zveze/ Union of Italo-Slovene Antifascist  
 Women  
 UDD – Unione Donne Democratiche/Union of Democratic Women  
 UDI – Unione Donne Italiane/ Union of Italian Women  
 USI – Unione Socialisti Indipendenti/ Union of Independent Socialists  
 PCI – Partito comunista Italiano/Italian Communist Party  
 PCRG/KPJK – Partito Comunista della Region Giulia/Komunistička Partija Julijska  
 Krajina/ Communist Party of the Julian Region  
 PCTLT – Partito Comunista del Territorio Libero di Trieste/Free Territory of Trieste  
 Communist Party  
 PDA – Partito d'Azione/ Action Party  
 PSI – Partito socialista Italiano/ Italian Socialist Party  
 TLT/FTT – Territorio Libero di Trieste / Free Territory of Trieste  
 WIDF/FDIF – Women's International Democratic Federation/Fédération  
 Démocratique Internationale Des Femmes

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## Summary

The Cold War era has generally been represented as a moment of conservatism when it comes to women's activism. While women's political participation in the Second World War had been studied in detail, women's political and social activism in Cold War Europe has remained under-researched. In my dissertation, I show the liveliness of women's political and social activism in Italy and Yugoslavia in the early Cold War period (1945-1957), demonstrating that women's antifascist organizations played an important role in everyday Cold War politics, at the local and at the international level. The thesis studies in particular the local and international activities of the Union of Italian Women (UDI) and of the Antifascist Women's Front of Yugoslavia (AFŽ), two women's organizations founded during the antifascist Resistance in Italy and Yugoslavia, which continued to play an active political role after 1945. It also takes into account the activities of the Union of Italo-Slovene Antifascist Women (UDAIS) in the contested border city of Trieste.

The dissertation is based on extensive fieldwork research in Italian and former Yugoslav archives. Oral history interviews and autobiographies represent a crucial complement to the archival research. Archival documents, and excerpts from oral history interviews and autobiographies in Italian, Serbo-Croatian and French are translated and organized into a single historical narrative, which demonstrates the entangled history of women's antifascist organizations in Italy and Yugoslavia after 1945. By writing this entangled history, I show that transnational connections were established by women across the Italo-Yugoslav border, and across Cold War borders. I explore the bilateral and multilateral relations of the UDI, AFŽ and UDAIS, and their shifting position towards the Women's International Democratic Federation (WIDF).

This dissertation is founded upon three main theses. The first thesis is that *antifascist women's organizations played an active role in everyday Cold War politics in Italy and Yugoslavia*. Throughout the dissertation, I reconstruct the different forms of women's activism and explore the complexities and limits of left-wing women's political agency and subjectivity. I focus in particular on the female leaders of antifascist women's organizations, and on their position towards the base of rank-and-file militants, and towards the "feminine masses". My second thesis is that *Italian and Yugoslav antifascist women's organizations were crucial in promoting women's emancipation in the Cold War period*. Antifascist women's organizations promoted women's literacy on a large scale, as well as access to work and political participation. On the basis of a Marxist faith in modernization and historical progress, antifascist female leaders fought against women's juridical, economic and social inferiority. Thirdly, I posit that *Italian and Yugoslav antifascist women's organizations provided women with imaginary and physical connections across Cold War borders*, not only between Italy

and Yugoslavia but also between the West, the Second World and the Third World. As I demonstrate, women's antifascist internationalism allowed progressive ideas about women's emancipation to circulate across borders.

The first chapter of my dissertation contains the theoretical and methodological frameworks of the research. I discuss in detail the different scholarly debates to which I wish to contribute, namely current debates about women's activism during the Cold War period, as well as debates on European feminist genealogies across East and West. I provide an outline of contemporary scholarly debates about women's history in Italy and post-Yugoslav successor states, and discuss the possible reasons for which antifascist women's activism in Cold War Italy and Yugoslavia has been written out of history. In the final part of Chapter 1 I describe the research methodology; I cite the reasons for the choice of an historical narration, and I discuss the types of document analyzed throughout the dissertation. In the remainder of the dissertation I organize the empirical material collected from archival research, oral history interviews and autobiographies in an historical narrative.

Chapter 2, *Women's antifascist Resistance in Italy and Yugoslavia*, provides an introduction to the complex history of the antifascist Resistance across the Italo-Yugoslav border. The chapter describes how transnational encounters between antifascist women had already started during World War Two, in Fascist jails or in concentration camps, such as the women's concentration camp of Ravensbruck. I compare the historiography about women's participation in the antifascist Resistance in Italy and Yugoslavia, relying on the secondary literature which describes the foundation of the Italian and Yugoslav women's antifascist organizations, the Union of Italian Women (UDI) and the Antifascist Women's Front of Yugoslavia (AFŽ).

Chapter 3, *The aftermath of the war: the UDI, the AFŽ and the task of reconstruction*, examines the post-war activities of the UDI and AFŽ at the local level. The chapter shows how antifascist women's activism continued in the post-war period, notably in the field of reconstruction and social work, as well as in the drafting of women's political, economic and social rights in the new Yugoslav and Italian Constitutions of 1946. This chapter mainly contributes to the second thesis of this dissertation, demonstrating that Italian and Yugoslav antifascist women's organizations were crucial in promoting women's emancipation in the post-war and Cold War period.

In contrast to the preceding emphasis on UDI and AFŽ local activities in favor of women's emancipation, Chapter 4, *Women's internationalism after 1945*, focuses on the active role played by antifascist women's organizations in everyday Cold War politics in Italy and Yugoslavia, and on the connections established by UDI and AFŽ members across borders. Based on extensive archival research, the chapter recounts how Italian and Yugoslav women's organizations established bilateral and multilateral relations within the framework of the newly founded Women's International Democratic Federation (WIDF). The case of the antifascist women's organization of Trieste (UDAIS) is also introduced in this chapter, illustrating how ideas about women's emancipation circulated at the international, national and local level.

Chapter 5, *From comrades to traitors: the Cominform Resolution of 1948*, provides an analysis of the Soviet-Yugoslav split of 1948-1949, focusing on its impact on Yugo-

slav, Italian and Italo-Slovene women's organizations in Trieste. In particular, I discuss the exclusion of the Antifascist Women's Front of Yugoslavia from the Women's International Democratic Federation in 1949. The chapter affirms the notion that women's organizations were active producers of Cold War narratives, and indicates how these narratives contributed to political repression and to the creation of internal and external enemies. The transnational perspective allows me to highlight the role of the WIDF, the AFŽ, the UDI and UDAIS in the production of Cold War narratives, and the part played by the leaders of these organizations in promoting the interests of their respective communist parties at the international level.

Chapter 6, *Into the field: the AFŽ, the UDI and the practice of emancipation*, covers a number of activist campaigns conducted by AFŽ and UDI in the less developed, rural areas of Italy and Yugoslavia between 1948 and 1953. The campaign against the full veil (*feredže*) in Yugoslavia and the campaign in favor of Italian women victims of rape by Allied soldiers in WWII are pertinent examples. While the previous chapter examined how women's organizations aligned themselves with their respective communist parties in international politics, this chapter highlights the conflicts that arose between women's organizations and communist party cadres at the local level. Issues that have been widely debated by feminist historians, such as the degree of political autonomy of the UDI and the AFŽ in the early Cold War period, as well as the dissolution of the AFŽ in 1953, are discussed in detail.

In Chapter 7, *After 1956: national ways to women's emancipation*, I analyze the changes in the Cold War geopolitics of 1956, and its effects on women's organizations in Italy, Yugoslavia and Trieste. In this chapter I discuss Italian and Yugoslav female leaders' critique of Soviet hegemony. I examine how Italian antifascist leaders worked to transform the methods and goals of the Women's International Democratic Federation by strengthening the focus on women's rights. I look, moreover, at Yugoslav female leaders' engagement in the politics of Non-Alignment, in connection with Third World women's organizations and decolonization movements. The main three theses of the dissertation are reestablished in this chapter: Italian and Yugoslav antifascist women's organizations played an active role in everyday Cold War politics, favoring the transnational circulation of progressive ideas about women's rights across Cold War borders.

In my concluding chapter, I first stress the contribution made to the field of women's and feminist history, particularly to the growing literature about women's transnational activism during the Cold War. Also, I reflect on the implications of the dissertation for contemporary Italian, post-Yugoslav and European feminist genealogies. Secondly, I specify the contribution made to the field of Cold War studies. I underline the importance of studying Cold War history from a gender and women's history perspective, and offer suggestions for future research. Finally, I point out the implications of this work for post-Cold War scholarly research. I reflect upon the relevance of my study for contemporary post-Cold War feminist narratives, and suggest possible directions for future studies in the field of women's history and feminist historiography.

## Samenvatting

De Koude Oorlog is over het algemeen voorgesteld als een conservatief tijdperk als het gaat om het activisme van vrouwen. Terwijl hun politieke participatie in de Tweede Wereldoorlog tot in detail is onderzocht, is het politieke en maatschappelijke activisme van vrouwen in het Europa van de Koude Oorlog onvoldoende bestudeerd. In mijn proefschrift bespreek ik het levendige politieke en maatschappelijke activisme van vrouwen in Italië en Joegoslavië in de vroege periode van de Koude Oorlog (1945-1957). Antifascistische vrouwenorganisaties speelden een belangrijke rol in de dagelijkse koudeoorlogspolitiek, zowel op lokaal als internationaal niveau. In mijn proefschrift bestudeer ik in het bijzonder de lokale en internationale activiteiten van de Unie van Italiaanse Vrouwen (UDI) en het Joegoslavische Antifascistische Vrouwenfront (AFŽ). Deze twee vrouwenorganisaties, die werden opgericht ten tijde van de antifascistische verzetsbeweging in Italië en Joegoslavië, speelden ook een actieve politieke rol in de naoorlogse periode. Er wordt in het proefschrift ook aandacht geschonken aan de activiteiten van de Unie van Italiaans-Sloveense Antifascistische Vrouwen (UDAIS) in de betwiste grensstad Triëst.

Het proefschrift is gebaseerd op uitgebreid veldwerk in archieven in Italië en voormalig Joegoslavië, aangevuld met cruciale oral history interviews en autobiografieën. Archiefdocumenten en fragmenten uit oral history interviews en Franse, Italiaanse en Servo-Kroatische autobiografieën zijn vertaald en geordend in één enkel historisch verhaal. In dit verhaal komt de complexe, naoorlogse geschiedenis van antifascistische vrouwenorganisaties in Italië en Joegoslavië tot leven. Het schrijven van deze complexe geschiedenis stelde me in staat om aan te tonen hoe vrouwen transnationale verbanden aangingen over de Italiaans-Joegoslavische grens en koudeoorlogsgrenzen heen. Ik verken de bilaterale, multilaterale betrekkingen tussen de UDI, AFŽ en UDAIS, en hun verschuivende positie ten opzichte van de Internationale Democratische Vrouwenfederatie (WIDF).

De drie voornaamste stellingen in dit proefschrift zijn: ten eerste, antifascistische vrouwenorganisaties speelden een actieve rol in de dagelijkse Italiaanse en Joegoslavische koudeoorlogspolitiek. Ik reconstrueer in het proefschrift steeds welke vormen het activisme van vrouwen aannam, waarbij ik ook de complexiteit en de beperkingen van progressief-politieke agency en de subjectiviteit van vrouwen exploreer. Ik richt me daarbij vooral op de vrouwelijke leiders van antifascistische vrouwenorganisaties en hun positie ten aanzien van hun militante achterban en de “vrouwelijke massa”. Mijn tweede stelling is dat Italiaanse en Joegoslavische antifascistische vrouwenorganisaties van cruciaal belang waren voor de bevordering van vrouwenemancipatie tijdens de Koude Oorlog. Antifascistische vrouwenorganisaties stimuleerden op grote schaal de geletterdheid van vrouwen, evenals hun toegang tot werk

en politieke participatie. Vanuit een marxistisch geloof in modernisering en historische vooruitgang bestreden vrouwelijke antifascistische leiders de minderwaardige positie van vrouwen op juridisch, economisch en maatschappelijk gebied. Ten derde, Italiaanse en Joegoslavische antifascistische vrouwenorganisaties stelden vrouwen in staat om imaginaire en fysieke verbindingen te onderhouden die de koudeoorlogsgrenzen overschreden, waarbij ik niet alleen doel op de Italiaans-Joegoslavische grens, maar ook op de grenzen tussen het Westen, de tweede wereld en de derde wereld. De antifascistische internationalisering van vrouwen veroorzaakte een uitwisseling van progressieve ideeën over vrouwenemancipatie die over grenzen heen reikte.

Het eerste hoofdstuk van het proefschrift bevat mijn theoretische en methodologische onderzoekskader. Ik leg gedetailleerd uit aan welke wetenschappelijke debatten ik een bijdrage wil leveren, namelijk hedendaagse discussies over het activisme van vrouwen tijdens de Koude Oorlog en debatten over Europese feministische genealogieën in het Oosten en het Westen. Ik geef een overzicht van hedendaagse wetenschappelijke debatten over de geschiedenis van vrouwen in Italië en in de post-Joegoslavische opvolgerstaten. En ik bespreek waarom en op welke manier het antifascistische verzet van vrouwen in Italië en Joegoslavië ten tijde van de Koude Oorlog buiten de geschiedschrijving is gehouden. In het laatste deel van hoofdstuk 1 beschrijf ik mijn onderzoeksmethodologie; ik leg uit waarom ik voor een historische vertelling heb gekozen en bespreek de verschillende soorten documenten die ik in dit proefschrift analyseer. In de rest van het proefschrift voeg ik het empirische materiaal dat ik ontleen aan archiefonderzoek, oral history interviews en autobiografieën samen tot één historisch verhaal.

Hoofdstuk 2, *Het antifascistische verzet van vrouwen in Italië en Joegoslavië*, biedt een inleiding op de complexe geschiedenis van het anti-fascistische verzet over de Italiaans-Joegoslavische grens heen. In de Tweede Wereldoorlog waren er al transnationale ontmoetingen tussen antifascistische vrouwen geweest, bijvoorbeeld in fascistische gevangenissen of concentratiekampen, zoals het vrouwenkamp Ravensbrück. Ik vergelijk de geschiedschrijving over de deelname van vrouwen aan het antifascistische verzet in Italië en Joegoslavië, met een beroep op de secundaire literatuur over de oprichting van Italiaanse en Joegoslavische antifascistische vrouwenorganisaties, als de Unie van Italiaanse Vrouwen (UDI) en het Joegoslavische Antifascistische Vrouwenfront (AFŽ).

In hoofdstuk 3, *De nasleep van de oorlog: de UDI, de AFŽ en de wederopbouw*, onderzoek ik de naoorlogse, lokale activiteiten van de UDI en de AFŽ. Het hoofdstuk laat zien hoe vrouwen na de oorlog hun antifascistische activisme voortzetten, met name op het gebied van de wederopbouw, het maatschappelijke werk en de wetgeving (met name hun bemoeienis met de opname van politieke, economische en sociale vrouwenrechten in de nieuwe Joegoslavische en Italiaanse grondwetten van 1946). Dit hoofdstuk draagt voornamelijk bij aan de tweede stelling van dit proefschrift, omdat het aantoont dat Italiaanse en Joegoslavische antifascistische vrouwenorganisaties cruciaal waren bij het bevorderen van vrouwenemancipatie in de naoorlogse periode en tijdens de Koude Oorlog.

Waar hoofdstuk 3 de nadruk legt op de lokale activiteiten van de UDI en AFŽ ter bevordering van de vrouwenemancipatie, richt hoofdstuk 4, *De internationalisering van vrouwen na 1945*, zich op de actieve rol van Italiaanse en Joegoslavische antifascistische vrouwenorganisaties in de koudeoorlogspolitiek, en de internationale connecties van UDI en AFŽ leden. Dit hoofdstuk is gebaseerd op diepgaand archiefonderzoek en beschrijft hoe Italiaanse en Joegoslavische vrouwenorganisaties bilaterale en multilaterale relaties onderhielden in het kader van de nieuw opgerichte Internationale Democratische Vrouwenfederatie (WIDF). Het hoofdstuk introduceert ook de antifascistische vrouwenorganisatie van Triëst (UDAI) als voorbeeld van de manier waarop ideeën over vrouwenemancipatie circuleerden op internationale, nationale en lokale niveaus.

In hoofdstuk 5, *Van kameraden tot verraders: de Cominform Resolutie uit 1948*, wordt de breuk tussen de Sovjet-Unie en Joegoslavië uit 1948-1949 geanalyseerd. De analyse richt zich op de impact van deze breuk op de Joegoslavische, Italiaanse en Italiaans-Sloveense vrouwenorganisaties in Triëst. Ik besteed vooral aandacht aan de manier waarop het Joegoslavische Antifascistische Vrouwenfront buiten de Internationale Democratische Vrouwenfederatie werd gehouden. Dit hoofdstuk bevestigt de idee dat vrouwenorganisaties actief koudeoorlogverhalen produceerden en legt uit hoe deze verhalen bijdroegen aan politieke repressie en de schepping van interne en externe vijanden. Mijn transnationale perspectief belicht de rol van de WIDF, AFŽ, UDI en UDAI in de productie van koudeoorlogverhalen, en de manier waarop de leiders van deze vrouwenorganisaties de belangen van hun respectievelijke communistische partijen internationaal behartigden.

Hoofdstuk 6, *In het veld: AFŽ, UDI en de praktijk van de emancipatie*, heeft betrekking op een aantal activistische campagnes van de AFŽ and UDI in de onderontwikkelde, landelijke gebieden van Italië en Joegoslavië in de periode 1948-1953. Relevante voorbeelden daarvan zijn de campagnes tegen de hoofddoek (*feredže*) in Joegoslavië en de campagne ten bate van de Italiaanse slachtoffers van verkrachtingen door geallieerde soldaten. Waar het vorige hoofdstuk onderzocht hoe vrouwenorganisaties zich in de internationale politiek verbonden met hun communistische partijen, bespreek ik in dit hoofdstuk de conflicten tussen vrouwenorganisaties en het lokale, communistische partijkader. Feministische historici hebben bepaalde kwesties, zoals de mate van politieke autonomie van de UDI en AFŽ aan het begin van de Koude Oorlog en de ontbinding van de AFŽ in 1953, uitgebreid besproken. Ik kom in dit hoofdstuk gedetailleerd terug op deze kwesties.

In hoofdstuk 7, *Na 1956: nationale wegen naar de emancipatie van vrouwen*, analyseer ik de geo-politieke veranderingen in de Koude Oorlog uit 1956, en hun effect op vrouwenorganisaties in Italië, Joegoslavië en Triëst. De kritiek van Italiaanse en Joegoslavische vrouwelijke leiders op de Sovjet hegemonie staat centraal in dit hoofdstuk. Ik onderzoek hoe Italiaanse, antifascistische leiders de methoden en doelen van de Internationale Democratische Vrouwenfederatie versterkten door zich op vrouwenrechten te concentreren. Bovendien bespreek ik de betrokkenheid van deze leiders bij de politiek van de Non-Alignment, in relatie tot vrouwenorganisaties in de Derde Wereld en dekolonisatie-bewegingen. De drie stellingen in het hart van dit proef-

schrift worden bevestigd in dit hoofdstuk: Italiaanse en Joegoslavische antifascistische vrouwenorganisaties speelden een actieve rol in de dagelijkse koudeoorlogs politiek. Zij bevorderden de transnationale circulatie van progressieve ideeën over vrouwenrechten over de grenzen van de Koude Oorlog heen.

In mijn afsluitende hoofdstuk benadruk ik de bijdrage van dit proefschrift aan vrouwengeschiedenis en feministische geschiedenis, in het bijzonder de groeiende literatuur over het transnationale activisme van vrouwen tijdens de Koude Oorlog. Ik denk in dit laatste hoofdstuk ook na over de implicaties van dit proefschrift voor hedendaagse Italiaanse, post-Joegoslavische en Europese feministische genealogieën. Ten tweede specificeer ik mijn bijdrage aan Koude Oorlog-Studies. Ik onderstreep het belang van het gender en vrouwengeschiedenis perspectief voor de studie van Koude Oorlog-geschiedenis en doe voorstellen voor toekomstig onderzoek. Als laatste wijs ik op de implicaties van dit proefschrift voor wetenschappelijk onderzoek naar de periode na de Koude Oorlog. Ik reflecteer op de relevantie van mijn proefschrift voor hedendaagse feministische verhalen over de periode na de Koude Oorlog en doe suggesties voor toekomstige studies in vrouwengeschiedenis en feministische historiografie.



## Biography

Chiara Bonfiglioli was born on January 24, 1983 in Bologna, Italy. In 2005 she obtained a bachelor in Cultures and Human Rights (cum laude) at the Faculty of Political Sciences, University of Bologna. In 2008 she completed a Research Master in Gender and Ethnicity (cum laude) at the University of Utrecht, with a thesis based on oral history interviews, addressing transnational encounters between Yugoslav and Western European feminist women in the late 1970s. The title of her MA thesis was *Belgrade, 1978. Remembering the conference «Drugarica Žena. Žensko Pitanje – Novi Pristup?»/«Comrade Woman. The Women's Question: A New Approach?» thirty years after*. Between 2008 and 2012, she carried out her PhD at the Research Institute for History and Culture (OGC), Graduate Gender Programme, Utrecht University, with a project titled *Revolutionary Networks. Women's Political and Social Activism in Cold War Italy and Yugoslavia (1945-1957)*. Chiara has taught on feminist history, gender and globalization, post-colonial and post-socialist studies. She has published several essays in Italian, English and French on women's and feminist history and politics in the European context, particularly on second wave feminist movements in Italy and Yugoslavia, on intersections of racism and sexism in Italy and on the headscarf debate in France.